

Alexander "Alec" Henry Tudor Lewis, was born in January 1887 and baptised on the 9th February 1887 in All Saints, Gloucester in Gloucestershire. He was the son of Arthur Henry Lewis (born 1855 and died 8th March 1910) and Susan Lewis (born 1857 and died 16th April 1932). The seventh oldest of fourteen children, Alec's family was as such: Percival G. A. Lewis (born 1878 and died 1923), Herbert Andrew Frederick Lewis (born 1879 and died 24th September 1879), Edith Agnes Lousie Lewis (born 28th February 1881 and died 30th March 1881), Harold Arthur Jesse Lewis (born 2nd October 1882 and died 25th October 1882), Howard Stanley Overton Lewis (born 28th October 1883 and died 21st November 1883), Martha Elsie Winifred Lewis (born 1885 and died 1957), Gertrude Lilian Maud Lewis (born 1887/88 and died 6th January 1888), Thomas Henry Raymond Lewis (born 1890 and was killed in action with the 1/5th Gloucesters 16th July 1916), Arthur Craven Samuel Lewis (born 1892 and died 25th January 1911), Susan Laurina May Lewis (born 1893 and died 18th October 1893), Melville Edward Lionel Lewis (born 1896 and was killed in action with the 1/5th Gloucesters 23rd July 1916), Doris Muriel Florence Lewis (born 1898 and died 16th March 1898).

The Lewis family was large even by Victorian times; three of the boys and five of the girls failed to complete their first year of life. Nevertheless, Alec, Thomas, Martha, Arthur and Melville were still alive at the end of 1898.

Alec's father and head of the household, Arthur, worked as a builder and the family were living at 61 Widden Street, Barton St Mary, Gloucester in 1891, but moved to 9 Prospect House on Conduit Street, Gloucester by 1901. Arthur must have been quite successful in his profession, as on the 19th August 1895, he conveyed:

Piece of garden ground then in the hamlet of Barton Saint Mary within the extended boundary of Gloucester containing 2 roods and 11 perches. And a cottage in the same place called The Ridge House with the garden and enclosed land thereto adjoining containing 3 roods and 23 perches, on the North east side of Lower Barton Street (plan).

From:

Ellen Burges of Yate, widow to Parry Burges of St Stephen St., Bristol, solicitor

Under:

Arthur Henry Lewis of Prospect House, Conduit St., Gloucester, builder

The amount conveyed was £650, and the witness were:

Frederick C. Burges, solicitor's clerk, Bristol.

Edith C. Brim, wife of rector of Walton, Warwick.

On the 31st October 1895, Arthur filled out a Certificate of Redemption of Land Tax owed on his:

Cottage and piece of land situated at the rear of Salisbury Road, Lower Barton Street in the parish of Barton Saint Mary, Glos. and containing 1 acre 34 perches (Plan).

The amount was:

Compounded for £7-6s-d

As a property developer, Arthur was earning a lot of money for the time as this deed of exchange dated 27th August 1897 eludes:

Deed of Exchange. 27 August 1897: I. Piece of garden land on the north east side of Lower Barton

street, Gloucester, containing 346 square yards II. Strip of land on the north east side of Lower Barton Street Gloucester containing 273 square yards. [Full details see description]

27th August 1897

I. Piece of garden land on the north east side of Lower Barton street, Gloucester, containing 346 square yards bounded on the north west by land next described on the south west and south east by the Corporations land and on the north east by a public footpath leading from Salisbury Road to Browns Mill, India Road And a piece of land containing 292 square yards adjoining the land first described on the north west and forming part of a new road called Hatfield Street.
II. Strip of land on the north east side of Lower Barton Street Gloucester containing 273 square yards, and bounded on the north west by and belonging to (1) and on the south east by Hatfield Street (plan). Provision for making a road by (1), (2) to pay £120 on completion.
(1) Arthur Henry LEWIS of Prospect House, Conduit Street, Gloucester, builder.
(2) Mayor, Alderman and Citizens of the CITY of GLOUCESTER.
Witnesses: John B Coren, Solicitor, Gloucester, James B Karn, Mayor.

By the 1901 census the Lewis family was as such:

9, Conduit Street, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, England Household Members:

Arthur H Lewis Head Married Male 46 1855 Builder Gloucestershire, England

Susan Lewis Wife Married Female 45 1856 Swansea, Glamorgan, Wales

Howard H O Lewis Son Single Male 17 1884 Engineering Apprentice Gloucestershire, England

Alexander H Lewis Son Single Male 14 1887 Gloucestershire, England

Thomas H Lewis Son Single Male 10 1891 Gloucestershire, England

Arthur S Lewis Son Single Male 9 1892 Gloucestershire, England

Melville E Lewis Son Single Male 5 1896 Gloucestershire, England

Edith A L Lewis Daughter Single Female 20 1881 Gloucestershire, England

Martha E W Lewis Daughter Single Female 15 1886 Pupil Teacher Day School Gloucestershire, England

Gertrude L Lewis Daughter Single Female 12 1889 Gloucestershire, England

Susan L Lewis Daughter Single Female 7 1894 Gloucestershire, England

Doris M Lewis Daughter Single Female 3 1898 Gloucestershire, England

The house was a redbrick terrace in the parish of Barton and Tredworth, which in 1901 had a population of 47,955.

In 1901, Alec was only 14 and attending The Crypt School in the city of Gloucester. Established in 1539 by Joan Cooke, the school has a strong rugby history and remains one of the oldest in England. The Old Cryptians' Club was founded on Monday 1st April 1901 at the Crypt School with the intention of bringing together the school's alumni for functions annually. The first Annual Dinner of the Old Boys' was held at the New Inn, Gloucester, on Thursday 8th May 1901. Alec's father-in-law owned this pub and there is no doubt that Alec would have been heavily involved in the organisation of such events. The New Inn is interestingly the most complete surviving example of a medieval

courtyard inn with galleries, in Britain. Built in 1450, The New Inn became famous as Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed Queen in 1553, upon King Edward VI's death, from the first floor gallery by the Abbott of Gloucester.

Leaving school at 18, 1905 holds the first record of Alec's rugby career. A speedy outside-centre, Alec was to leave a legacy with the Gloucester rugby community over the course of his playing days.

The Gloucestershire Echo 6th January 1905, records Alec representing the Naunton Park Rugby Football Club in Cheltenham:

Naunton Park II v. Tredworth:

Naunton Park II-...three-quarters; Alec Lewis (capt.)...

It can be assumed that Alec had been playing for Naunton for some time leading up to 1905 as he is listed above as the captain of its 2nd XV. Soon after, Ale was named vice-captain of Nauton Park's 1st XV side, an honour for such a young man. As the Gloucestershire Echo 8th June 1905 illuminates:

Sporting Gossip:

The annual general meeting of the Naunton Park Rugby Football Club was held on Monday evening last...The following were then chosen to fill the various offices of the club for the ensuing season...Vice-captain Mr. Alec Lewis...

In the same year, Alec began representing the fledgling Gloucester Old Boys Rugby Football Club, a team composed of alumni from the three Gloucester City Schools: Sir Thomas Rich's Grammar School, The Crypt School, and The King's School. Gloucester Old Boys RFC was formed in 1904, when Gloucester captain George Romans placed an advert in the local Gloucester Citizen requesting to form a team from the aforementioned schools. Thus, on the 31st August 1904, the Old Boys club was born with its colour as navy blue. Not long after this, the Gloucestershire Echo 1st November 1905 recorded Alec as having played for the Old Boys XV on a dreary day:

Football:

Cheltenham Athletic v. Gloucester Old Boys:

Played on the Athletic Ground on Wednesday in wet and miserable weather...Old Boys-...three-quarters...Alec Lewis...

The Athletic were minus the services of their captain (F. Goulding), and the Old Boys had one or two substitutes. Rain fell in torrents when the game started, and play was more or less of a scramble...

Final:

Cheltenham Athletic- 1 try (3 pts.)

Gloucester Old Boys- Nil.

Alec appeared in the Gloucestershire Echo 1st December 1905:

Teams for Tomorrow's Matches:

Gloucester Old Boys v. South End:

Old Boys-...A. Lewis, three-quarters...

The Gloucestershire Echo 29th December 1905 again named Alec in the Old Boys side:

Football:

Teams for Tomorrow's Matches:

Gloucester Old Boys-...A.Lewis, three-quarters...

Now a regular in the XV, Alec was mentioned in the Gloucestershire Echo 23rd February 1906:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Gordon Wanderers:

Old Boys-...A. Lewis...three-quarters...

During this time, Alec was teaching at The Tredworth Council School. A talented sportsman, Alec was a member of the Western Counties' Swimming Association as a representative of Gloucester. The Gloucester Citizen 18th December 1906 noted:

Western Counties' Swimming Association:

*At a Council meeting of the above on Saturday, it was unanimously decided to place the following resolutions before the general meeting of the A.S.A. : That the standard time for the 200 yards breast stroke championship be altered from 3 minutes to 3 minutes 10 seconds; that the club water polo championship entries be divided into two divisions for the first two rounds; that in club polo and county polo championships, the deepest water that the bath will allow shall be played in; that all baths where amateur polo championships finals are played in must be approved by the A.S.A. Committee; that gold medals be given to the winners of the county and club water polo championships; that there be added to the beginning of the amateur expenses clause: "Asking for, offering, or accepting remuneration. &c."...**Mr. Alex Lewis (Gloucester) was present at the meeting.***

No doubt Alec's fitness for rugby aided his swimming and vice-versa.

The Gloucester Citizen 15th March 1907, records Alec's continued involvement in the Old Boys 1906-1907 season:

Football:

To-morrow's Matches:

*Gloucester Old Boys v. West End- At Hempsted (kick-off 4 o'clock). Old Boys: W.L. Dabis, back; W.J. Vance, **Alec Lewis**...*

An increasingly senior member of the team, Alec was chosen to lead the team in a short space of time due to the injury of Sid Lane. The Gloucester Citizen & Gloucestershire Echo 11th October 1907:

Football:

To-morrow's Matches:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Lydney A:

*At Hempsted (kick-off 3 o'clock). Old Boys- Norman Jones, back...W.J. Vance, **Alec Lewis (capt.)**, Ridge Jones and P. Rodway, three-quarter backs.*

This match cemented Alec's position as captain, and the Gloucester Citizen 18th October 1907 named him as such:

Football:

Tomorrow's Matches:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Cheltenham A.:

*Old Boys- Norman Jones, back: **Alec Lewis (capt.)**...*

The following week, Alec appeared in the Gloucestershire Echo 25th October 1907:

Football:

Cheptsow v. Gloucester Old Boys:

*At Chepstew tomorrow the Old Boys' team will be: -...**Alec Lewis (capt.)**...three-quarters...*

With Lane's return, Alec was mentioned in the Gloucester Citizen 7th September 1907 with praise:

Football:

Gloucester Old Boys:

*The Gloucester Old Boys look forward with great keenness to the coming season. The programme mapped out for them is a stiff one, and will want no little determination to get through with creditable honours...Sid Lane will again lead the premier team, and **Alec Lewis who showed such fine promise at right centre three-quarter last year, will act as sub-captain**...*

The season had been a success so far for Alec, who at only 20 years of age, had experienced a meteoric rise to a leadership position.

More praise was heaped upon the young man by the Gloucester Citizen 7th October 1907:

Football:

Glo'ster Old Boys v. Handsworth:

*Record Still Intact- In Saturday's Football "Citizen" the result of the Old Boys' match v. Handsworth was given as a defeat for the Gloucesterians by 12 points to 8. This was incorrect, the actual result being a win for the Old Boys (**who maintained their splendid unbeaten record, which enters on three seasons**) by 12 points to 8...The other reserves also showed promise, the forwards particularly playing a strong game from start to finish. **Alec Lewis' dropped goal was a first-class effort, and followed a fine bout of short passing among the forwards and halves, after a kick out near the centre line**...*

Since its conception in 1904, the Gloucester Old Boys had maintained an unbeaten record; a credit to the talent produced by the three city schools, whose 1st XV's the Old Boys would have no doubt represented.

The Gloucester Citizen 25th October 1907 noted Alec's promotion to captain of the Old Boys side once more:

Football:

Tomorrow's Matches:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Chepstow:

At Chepstow (train 1:50 G.W.R.)

*Old Boys-...**Alec Lewis (captain)**...*

Alec maintained this for the following fixture as the Gloucestershire Echo 1st November 1907 shows:

Football:

Teams for Tomorrow's Matches Rugby:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Handsworth:

*Old Boys- Norman Jones...**Alec Lewis (capt.)**...*

1907 was a milestone in Alec's life as he was picked for the County side, as the Gloucester Citizen 8th November 1907 reveals:

Football:

To-morrow's Matches:

Gloucestershire v. Devon:

*Gloucestershire-...Three-Quarters...**A. Lewis (Lydney)***

Although there is no record of this, Alec had been playing for Lydney Rugby Football Club in Gloucester. Founded in 1888, Lydney drew the majority of its players from the local tinsplate works, earning the club the nickname "The Tinplaters".

The next week, Alec was again playing for Old Boys as they continued their unbeaten form. The Gloucester Citizen 15th November 1907:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Bristol Nomads:

*At Hempsted (kick-off 3 o'clock sharp). Old Boys-...**Alec Lewis**...*

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 16th November 1907:

Gloucester Old Boys b. Birmingham University:

*There is good sport to be seen on the meadow fringing the Seven at Llanthony, Gloucester. The games are played for the pure love of the game; but occasionally the games played there are one-sided. This was the case when the Gloucester "Old Boys" met a team representing Birmingham University on Saturday. They were entirely lacking in combination, and the Old Boys always had the upper hand...The University men played up gamely but were quite outclassed at all points, and in the end were most decisively beaten by 5 goals and 7 tries (46 points) to nothing...For the winners **Alec Lewis and Rodway were most conspicuous.***

Alec's contribution to his team was once again noticed, as his reputation grew amongst the Gloucester rugby community.

Captaining the Old Boys side once more, Alec's team opposed Swindon as the Gloucester Citizen & Gloucestershire Echo 13th December 1907 read:

Football:

Teams for Tomorrows Matches. Rugby:

Swindon v. Gloucester Old Boys:

*Old Boys-...**Alec Lewis (captain)**...*

The Old Boys suffered a loss at the hands of the Gloucester A side as the Gloucester Citizen 26th December 1907 wrote:

Today's Football:

Glo'ster A. v. Glo'ster Old Boys:

Victory For The City Seconds:

*Ideal football prevailed on Boxing Day, and with the keen rivalry existing between Gloucester A and the Old Boys there was a good attendance in the morning at Kingsholm to witness the first meeting of the team this season...Gloucester Old Boys.- ...**Alec Lewis (capt.)**...*

Result:

Gloucester A- 2 goals 1 try (13 points)

Old Boys- 2 tries (6 points)

Remarks:

*It was a red-hot game...**Lewis often came under notice**...This was the Old Boys' third defeat of the season.*

Despite the loss, Alec played stoically as captain under immense pressure.

Again Alec proved his worth as the Gloucestershire Echo 26th December 1907 mentions:

Today's Football:

Gloucester A v. Gloucester Old Boys:

*...Romans got in a few useful kicks, while **Lewis was also prominent**...*

Playing alongside George Romans, a man considered to be one of the best fullbacks of his day, Alec must have been incredibly inspired. Romans was a prolific kicker converting 344 tries and kicking 29 of his own, and was unlucky not to have represented England having been a reserve for several tests.

The following year the Gloucester Chronicle 14th November 1908 records Alec providing an excellent account of himself as a kicker for Old Boys:

Football:

Old Boys v. Handsworth:

*For the second time this season, the Gloucester Old Boys scored heavily against Birmingham opponents. On the first occasion the University players suffered from lack of practice and on Saturday the team sent down by Handsworth were outclassed at all points of the game. Tries were scored for the Old Boys by W.J. Vance (2), W.J. Pearce (2), **Sid Lane and Alec Lewis, Barns converting four out of the six tries.***

Result:

Gloucester Old Boys- 4 goals, 2 tries (26 pts.)

Handsworth- Nil.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 5th December 1908 details the intense match that took place between Old Boys and their rivals, Gloucester A:

Football:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Gloucester A:

Old Boys Lose Their Ground Record:

*There is always keen rivalry between these teams, and the first meeting of the season at Denmark-road, on Saturday, aroused a good deal of interest, The Old Boys were without Sid Lane (capt.)...The Old Boys kicked off and benefitted by the exchange, **Alex Lewis gaining ground by kicking into touch...The City came back, however, but the Old Boys were saved by a smart effort by A. Lewis, that took play into the Seconds' 25.***

Half-time:

Old Boys- nil

Gloucester A- nil

*On the re-start, **Alec Lewis led the home backs in a splendid movement, and getting a re-pass scored an apparent try, but the point was disallowed for some infringement in the mid-field.** After this disappointment, the Old Boys worked desperately, and for some time had the best of matters. They initiated a good rush which was only stopped by a magnificent mark by Cook. Daniells and Craddock led the visitors right away, and some terribly exciting play was witnessed on the Old Boys line. At length A'Bear and Pearce managed to temporarily remove the danger, but shortly after a rush resulted in Hubert Smith scored from a melee in the corner. Hayward failed with the kick- a very difficult try was added, the extra points being easily added from a good position. The final arrived soon after.*

Result:

Gloucester A- 1 goal, 1 try (8 points)

Old Boys- nil

Alec played a valiant game under intense pressure and was the standout performer in his defeated side. It seemed that he was struggling to save an outclassed team, and that his best efforts to force Old Boys onto the scoreboard had been thwarted by misconduct.

December 1908 was significant for Alec as it was his first recorded game representing Gloucester city. At 21 years old, he would have been one of the junior players, yet with an impressive record already behind him. Wearing the number 13 jumper, Alec and Gloucester came up against Clifton in this fixture. The Gloucestershire Echo 5th December 1908:

Clifton v. Gloucester:

Owing to the Gloucestershire v. Somerset march at Kingsholm, the city team were very weakly represented on Saturday in their Country League fixture with Clifton on the latter's ground, Welshman F. Smith, W. Hall, Gent, Stephens, Berry and Johns all being engaged with the county. To fill the many vacancies a great call was made on the A team, which supplied nearly all the backs. Notwithstanding this, the 'Cestrians were hopeful of gaining two more points on the League table. The revised teams were:

Gloucester:

*...Three-quarters...**Alec Lewis**...*

Clifton commenced operations, and play settled just inside the Gloucester half. From the ensuing scrum the ball came out of the home side and a clever movement by Marsden set the Clifton backs in motion. Matters looked decidedly rosy for the homesters, but the movement was put an end to by Butler knocking on in the visitors' 25. The 'Cestrians worked out to safer quarters, and Pagler further improved their position with a fine kick to Clifton territory, where play remained for a time. The visitors set up a vigorous attack, and some nice bouts of passing took place between their backs. On one or two occasions it looked as though they would cross the Clifton line, Baldwin being continually dangerous on the left. It was not that the defence of the homesters was brilliant- far from it- but the movements of the visiting threes lacked the necessary finish. Eventually Clifton relieved the pressure for a time with a couple of good touch-finders which took play to near the centre. Gloucester were not to be denied, however, and the homesters were soon again having a warm time of it defending their line. The visiting three-quarters again indulged in passing, and this time there was no mistake about it, Pegler going over with a pretty try, which Cook converted, play having then been in progress ten minutes.

The reverse put the homesters on their mettle, as their forwards immediately rushed to Gloucester quarters, where the visitors were penalised and a goal nearly resulted. Cook saved the situation well, attacking the ball in fine style and getting in his kick before Gardner, who followed up well, could get to him. Clifton continued to press, however, and Butler cross-kicked, but Gloucester secured possession and eased the pressure. Clifton were now playing a fine game, their forwards showing up grandly in loose work; but in the tight scrums they could not secure the ball, with the result that their threes did not get going very often. Play was now transferred to the home half, and Gloucester set up a determined attack. Clifton threw away a try to Dix, through two men going for the ball, at the same time, the Gloucester man walking in. Cook again converted in fine style.

The visitors were far speedier than the home menu, but notwithstanding this Clifton again attacked, and Cook was called upon twice in quick succession to save his side, which he did very cleverly. Then Hingham was prominent with a strong run, but he was unsupported, and Gloucester again got to the centre. Clifton cam again, however, and when the interval arrived the game was being waged at Gloucester 25.

Half-Time:

Gloucester- 2 goals (10 pts)

Clifton- Nil.

Unfortunately, the account halts at the half-time score.

Alec's prolific scoring record was continued in the match between Old Boys and Chepstow as the Gloucester Chronicle 19th December 1908 records:

Football:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Chepstow:

This match was played at Chepstow, on Saturday, when the following was the result:-

Old Boys- 8 pts

Chepstow- 5 pts

Alec Lewis scored both

Alec had led his side to victory by example in this match. The Gloucestershire Chronicle 9th January 1909 records another match in which Alec performed admirably:

Cheltenham v. Gloucester:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Lydney A:

*The Old Boys met Lydney Seconds at Lydney , on Saturday, with a weak side, Sid Lane, Soutar, Ellis, and Howard Lewis being among the absentees. The visitors came one short but had the assistance of Gilbert Ellaway of the Lydney First team. **The Old Boys scored a splendid unconverted try, Vance receiving from Alec Lewis and racing in from half-way.** Lydney pressed after this reverse, but lost a couple of chances through knocking on. Good passing by Lydney nearly took effect, but Langford saved well. Following a clever bout of passing G. Harrison scored for Lydney wide out, and W. Harrison converted with a big kick. Play continued to be contested in the visitors' half, but the defence of the Old Boys was very good.*

Half Time:

Lydney A- 1 goal

Gloucester Old Boys- 1 try

Lydney were the first to attack a play being resumed, a couple of passing bouts taking place close to the Old Boy's line. Several times the Seconds were nearly over again, but the visiting backs were rather faster than those of Lydney, and this prevented the homesters from getting over. The Old Boys worked their way to the Lydney half where they stayed until Preest send them back by good footwork, and W. Harrison from a long way out, just failed to kick a marked goal. Lydney pressed hotly, and F. Miles scored a second try after a splendid run. W. Harrison converted. Vance made a fine run for the Old Boys, Harrison saving just in time. Lydney A retaliated with good passing, Fred Miles again being prominent. The game was a fine one to watch and the home team who were cleverer throughout, deserved to win by a larger score.

Result:

Lydney A- 2 goals (10 pts)

Gloucester Old Boys- 1 try (3 pts)

Alec setup the only try of the match for the Old Boys.

Alec played his next match against Bream, recorded in the Gloucestershire Echo 22nd January 1909:

Football:

Teams for Tomorrow's Matches Rugby:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Bream:

*Old Boys-...three-quarters; **Alec Lewis**...*

Beaten by Lydney A in their last fixture, the Old Boys were champing at the bit to even the score. Alec was instrumental in the Old Boys' victory over their rivals. A gleeful Gloucestershire Chronicle 23rd January 1909:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Lydney A. "Revenge is Sweet."

*...The Old Boys had the best of the first half...**Alec Lewis kicked a fine penalty goal from the touch line, and just previously he had beat lines, making a fine run three-parts of the field and behind the posts, but he was called back from going into touch...Lewis was prominent with fine touch-kicking...***

Result:

Gloucester Old Boys- 1 goal (p) 2 tries (9 pts)

Lydney A- 1 try (3 pts)

The Gloucestershire Echo 29th January 1909 names Alec in the Old Boys squad that played his former club, Naunton Park:

Gloucester O.B. v. Naunton Park:

*Old Boys...**Alec Lewis...***

Alec displayed another stellar performance against the Bristol Nomads as the Gloucestershire Chronicle 20th March 1909 recounted:

Gloucester Old Boys v. Bristol Nomads:

*This match was played at Gloucester on Saturday. The Old Boys kicked off very late, as is usually the custom. The visitors started at it right away, and a forward rush nearly took them over the home line. After the determined play, however, W. Pearse relived matters with a clever run. Working well together, the Old Boys pressed their opponents and Aston eventually got over in the corner after some pretty play by Catesby and **Lewis**. **The last-named made a brilliant but unsuccessful attempt to add the extra points from a difficult position.** After some level play in midfield, a bout of passing culminated in Shute getting across for Bristol. Shipp's kick failed. A few minutes after Allen again scored for them, chiefly through a burst away by Frost. Shipp's kick again went wide of the mark. The Old Boys got going again, and a kick from **Alec Lewis** going to Donald Pearce, the latter cut through and touched down in a good position, but the extra points were not added.*

Half-Time:

Old Boys- 2 tries

Bristol Nomads- 2 tries

*After the interval it was soon evident that Bristol were to be the defeated side. **A magnificent run was achieved by Alec Lewis, and his pass was safely piloted home by Catesby.** The kick went wide of the mark. The Old Boys tried hard to repeat their success, but although they kept their opponents pinned to their own line they somehow seemed unable to do the trick. Repeated dashes were made by the homesters, but luck was against them and they only landed home with the just adequate lead of one try. **Alec Lewis played a great game**, as did the brothers Pearce, whilst Aston justified his inclusion in the front rank.*

Final:

Gloucester Old Boys- 3 tries (9 points)

Bristol Nomads- 2 tries (6 points).

In 1910 Alec began studying to become an assistant master at Tredworth Council School. Situated on the corner of Tredworth Road and Tredworth High Street, the school was opened in 1887 and accommodated 684 boys, girls and infants. However, by 1904 the school had become overcrowded, with 770 pupils enrolled. Henry's older sister, Martha, also taught at the Tredworth Council School. The Gloucester Journal 6th August 1910:

London Matriculations:

*The London University matriculation pass list for June contains the following local names:-...**A.H.T. Lewis, Gloucester School of Science...***

Alec had been studying at the Gloucester School of Science previously, and completed a postgraduate course at the University of London. He thus would have taught science at Tredworth.

1910 was an unfortunate year for the Lewis family, as they lost their head, Arthur Henry Lewis. Alec's father's obituary appeared in the Gloucestershire Chronicle 12th March 1910:

Death of Mr Arthur Henry Lewis:

A Valued Barton Ward Conservative:

The announcement of the death of Mr Arthur Henry Lewis, of Overton, Dean's Way Gloucester, was received with universal regret amongst the large circle of his friends in the city. The sad occurrence which prompts us, on behalf of our readers, to extend our deepest sympathy to the bereaved family, took place at deceased's residence about mid-day on Tuesday as the result of a stroke. Early in the morning he had remarked that he had never felt better in his life, but he was taken ill about 9 o'clock, as he was starting out for his day's business, and did not rally from the attack.

The deceased, who was 55 years of age, was a member of a well-known local family, and was himself a very popular citizen, highly esteemed as a business man and as a politician. A builder by trade, his handicraft is attested to by numerous buildings in the district, particularly in the Barton and Kingsholm districts. He was a son of the late Mr Frederick Lewis, builder, of Millbrook-street, whom he and his brother (Mr Nugent Lewis) succeeded in business some thirty years ago. Amongst some of the buildings erected under the joint superintendence of Messrs Lewis Brothers were portions of Widdens-street and Upton-street, Napier-street, and St James'-crescent. Mr Lewis was Clerk of Works on the Quay wall when it was rebuilt, and was afterwards toll collector at the Cattle Market. During recent years he re-entered the building trade and carried out a great improvement in the building development of Kingsholm Close, re-named Dean's Way. During the last year or so he erected over a dozen houses in Deans Walk, in doing which he was instrumental in carrying out a great public improvement by widening the roadway at his place.

In political conviction, Mr Lewis was a strong Conservative, and during the whole of his political career was actively associated with the Barton Ward, where he was Vice-Chairman of the Conservative "60" and a most valued worker. A tower of strength to the Conservative party, his geniality and constant good humour won for him the respect and esteem of his opponents. He was one of the original members of the Conservative Club, and too a very active part in, most of the elections of his time, many of which were of a stirring character. The fact that he was so well-known was a valuable asset in electioneering, and his ability and success in canvassing was greatly valued by his party. As leader of the workers in the Barton Ward he worked untiringly during the recent

election to bring about the return of Mr Henry Terrell, K.C., to represent Gloucester in the Conservative and Unionist interest. He was a regular attendant at the True Blue Dinner, and was present on the last occasion, when Mr Terrell's victory was celebrated. In Municipal matters he actively assisted the late Mr Theophilus Baker, MR Charles Taynton, and Messrs Samuel and William Harris, together with other gentlemen obtain seats on the City Council. The flag at the Conservative Club was flown half-mast as a tribute of respect to one of the staunchest members and supporters of the Party.

He was a prominent and popular member of the Ancient Order of Druids, in which Society he filled some of the chief offices. He was present at the planting, some two years ago, of the oak which will succeed the venerable Lassington Oak when that famous tree, of hoary age, succumbs in the natural order of things. Though not a cricketer himself he was a supporter of the Longford Cricket and Bowling Clubs, at the annual dinner of which organisation he presided a year ago. He had consented to preside at a similar function which was to have been held on Thursday night, but which was postponed in consequence of his death.

*Deceased leaves a widow and twelve children to mourn his loss. One of his sons, Mr Herbert Lewis, who has been successful in his profession in South Africa, returned to England at Christmas for a six months' holiday, and was at home at the time of his father's death. Two other of his sons, Messrs **Alec** and Howard Lewis, are both well-known Old Boys, of which team they have each been captain. Mr Percy Lewis has been assisting his father in business and will, we understand, will take over the management.*

A report of the funeral appears on page 7.

The Late Mr Arthur Henry Lewis:

*The funeral of the late Mr Arthur Henry Lewis, of Overton, Dean's Way, Gloucester, whose death is reported in another part of our columns, took place on Friday morning. The first part of the service was conducted at All Saint's Church, the officiating clergyman being the Re. A.H. Cheesman...The chief mourners were: Mrs Lewis (widow), Percy, Bert, Pattis, Howard, **Alec**, Tom, Gertie, Susie, Doris, Arthur and Melville (sons and daughters)...*

Alec's father's estate was managed by Jones and Blakeway Solicitors who placed an advert in the Gloucestershire Chronicle 19th March 1910:

Mr Arthur Henry Lewis, Deceased.

All persons having any claim or demand upon the estate of Arthur Henry Lewis, late of Overton, Dean's Way, Gloucester, Builder and Contractor, deceased, are requested to send particulars thereof to us, the undersigned, and all Persons owing any Money to the deceased are requested to pay the same to us, the undersigned. Dated this 16th day of March, 1910

JONES AND BLAKEWAY

Solicitors to the Executrix.

Eldon Chambers, Gloucester.

In the same year, the Gloucester Citizen 31st August 1910 noted Alec as selected in the city side:

Football:

The Football "Citizen":

Commences on Saturday- We shall commence publication of the Football Edition on Saturday...Our Football editor who has been following the city team for the past eighteen seasons will again give special attention to the doings of the Gloucester fifteen...

Gloucester's Opening Match:

*The Selected Team- The city club means to lose no time in getting to serious work, and Saturday will witness the opening match at Kingsholm, Bream providing the opposition. The Gloucester players have turned up well at training for the past fortnight and are all very keen...**Alec Lewis of Old Boys, who had the misfortune to sprain his wrist in the opening match last season, and again later in an Association game, will be given a further trial against Bream...**The selected side is as follows: C. Cook, A. Hudson (capt.), W. Hall, **A. Lewis...***

The paragraph reveals that Alec had injured his wrist in the previous season's opening match playing for Gloucester, and therefore had been unfit for selection in the city team. However, the home fixture against Bream provided Alec with another opportunity. The Gloucester Citizen 2nd September 1910:

Gloucester v. Bream:

At Kingsholm (kick-off 3:30).

*Gloucester- C. Cook; A. Hudson (captain), **Alec Lewis...***

The following match report was listed in the Gloucester Citizen 3rd September 1910:

To-day's Football:

Gloucester v. Bream:

*The season was opened at Kingsholm today in summer-like weather. Bream providing the opposition to the City. Gloucester turned out as selected, but there was a change in the Bream ranks. There was only a small attendance of spectators when the teams lined out ten minutes late as follows: - C. Cook; A. Hudson (captain), **Alec Lewis**, W. Hall, and W. Washbourne...*

Half-time score:

Gloucester- 3 tries

Bream- Nil

Result:

Gloucester- 3 goals, 5 tries (30 points)

Bream- 1 goal (5 points)

The Gloucestershire Echo 3rd September 1910 recorded:

Today's Football:

Gloucester v. Bream:

The Gloucester Club opened the season Saturday with a match against Bream at Kingsholm, in which the following players took part: -

*Gloucester - ...**Alec Lewis**...*

*...**Some good passing by the Gloucester three-quarters** and a fine run by Washbourne enabled the homesters to reach the centre...*

Although not detailed, these two accounts highlighted the good work of the Gloucester three-quarters, of which Alec was a part, and Gloucester's victory over Bream. The Gloucestershire Chronicle 10th September 1910 gives a clearer recount of events:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

The Game:

*The opening fixture was full of excitement, and under the conditions prevailing, the game proved bright and interesting- a lot more interesting than a "Possible" v. "Probables" match or an ordinary practice, such as had been previously been arranged...**On the other wing Alec Lewis and W. Washbourne played well together. The form of Lewis was very encouraging, his kicking being very cleverly judged. I hope he will be able to keep clear from accidents...**The score was 3 goals, 5 tries (30 points) to 1 goal (5 points) in favour of the Citizens.*

Alec had proven himself worthy of a jumper to the selectors. His kicking, which had served him well in the Old Boys side, was remarkable.

Gloucester Citizen 24th September 1910:

Today's Football:

Gloucester v. Clifton:

*In brilliant weather these teams met at Kingsholm before a moderate crowd. Gloucester a good side. The teams lined out at 3:35 as follows: - ...**A. Lewis**...*

The Game:

*Gloucester kicked off against the sun, the return going to touch at the centre. From a loose kick **Alec Lewis gathered and put in a cross punt which was fielded by an opponent who sent to touch in the Gloucester half**...Gloucester were heeling continually, but the backs could not put the finishing touches to the attacking movements. Hall once cut through beautifully, **but with a clear opening Lewis fumbled a reverse pass**. Gloucester continued to make mistakes in handling...Near the centre Dix and Stephens got the ball away, and **Lewis sending to Washbourne**, the right wing racing down touch...*

Gloucester- 1 goal (d) 5 tries

Clifton- Nil

Although Alec had made errors in this match, Gloucester won with him having a hand in play.

Gloucester Rugby Football Club is a professional English rugby union club that was formed in 1873. The team's colours are cherry and white hoops. The home ground Kingsholm Stadium, has a

grandstand at its North End, termed "The Shed" because of its low roof and proximity to the sideline.

Alec was a member of the Gloucester Conservative Club like his father, which put together a side for a charity fixture against Gloucester Franciscans. The Gloucester Citizen 21st December 1910:

Charity Match at Kingsholm:

*Gloucester Franciscans v. Conservative Club- at Kingsholm, on Thursday, by kind permission of the Gloucester F.C. (kick-off 2:45)...Conservative Club:...**Alec Lewis**...*

The Mayor of Gloucester has promised to kick off. Players will change at the Kingsholm Inn.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 24th December 1910:

Football:

Charity Match at Gloucester:

*The Gloucester Conservative Club met the Franciscans at Kingsholms on Thursday, the proceeds to be handed over to the Mayor's fund for relieving the sufferers from the floods. The teams lined out as follows: -...Conservative Club- ...**Alec Lewis**...*

The Mayor of Gloucester (Councillor James Bruton), kicked off and throughout the whole of the game the pace was hot and the play "merry and bright"...

The result was:

Franciscans, 4 tries (12 points)

Conservative Club, 1 goal (5 points)

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 24th December 1910 records the same match:

Football:

Charity Match at Gloucester:

*The Gloucester Conservative Club met the Franciscans at Kingsholms on Thursday, the proceeds to be handed over to the Mayor's fund for relieving the sufferers from the floods. The teams lined out as follows: -...Conservative Club- ...**Alec Lewis**...*

The Mayor of Gloucester (Councillor James Bruton), kicked off and throughout the whole of the game the pace was hot and the play "merry and bright"...

The result was:

Franciscans, 4 tries (12 points)

Conservative Club, 1 goal (5 points)

The 1911 Census noted the following living arrangements in the Lewis household:

2 Deansway Gloucester, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, England Household Members

Susan Lewis Wife Widow Female 55 1856 Swansea Glamorgan

Martha E W Lewis Daughter Single Female 25 1886 Gloster Gloucestershire Teacher

Alexander N J Lewis Son Single Male 24 1887 Gloster Gloucestershire Teacher

Gertrude L M Lewis Daughter Single Female 22 1889 Gloster Gloucestershire

Thomas H R Lewis Son Single Male 20 1891 Gloster Gloucestershire Draughtsman

Susan L M Lewis Daughter Single Female 17 1894 Gloster Gloucestershire School

Melville E L Lewis Son Single Male 15 1896 Gloster Gloucestershire School

Doris M F Lewis Daughter Female 13 1898 Gloster Gloucestershire School

The Gloucester Citizen 21st January 1911 illuminated a change in Alec's positioning within the Gloucester city team:

From WB's Note Book:

More Experiments:

*For today's match with Plymouth the Gloucester three-quarter line included W. Washbourne who has lately been playing with the Seconds. Clock, who has been operating in the position, has not had sufficient experience, and a further period with the A team will do him no harm. Stanley Cook who has been on the injured list for some weeks, was originally selected for centre, **with Alec Lewis on the wing**, but Cook is not yet fit.*

Being such a versatile player came in handy as the Gloucester Citizen 4th February 1911 recounts:

Today's Football:

Gloucester v. Cheltenham:

*At one time it appeared likely that this match at Cheltenham- the third fixture of the season- would not be played owing to frost, but the break-up in the weather on Friday continued, and, greatly to the relief of the Town Club officials the fixture was duly brought off...Owing to an injury to the thigh, sustained in the Lydney match, Gloucester were robbed of the valuable services of W. Hall, the clever outside half, the vacant position **being filled by Alec Lewis...***

...He again fed Lewis, and the latter held on the long half through being marked by an opponent nothing was doing drew his subsequent pass...

Alec was drafted into outside-half due to an injury, and being particularly speedy, was able to make an impact through his runs.

The Gloucester Citizen 11th February 1911 narrated a match where Alec played in the Gloucester A side:

Today's Football:

Gloucester A v. Cinderford District:

*These teams met at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon before a very large attendance. It was a matter of satisfaction to note that the men were punctual in the arena for a change, facing each other as follows- Gloucester A; -....**A. Lewis...***

*...Gloucester pressed now, and Allen opening out well gave to **Alec Lewis, who ran almost to the line. He appeared to have the defence beaten, but passed to Hamblin who muffed it, and Cinderford... cleared...***

Half-Time score:

Gloucester A- 1 goal, 2 tries

Cinderford District- Nil.

Result:

Gloucester A- 1 goal (d), 4 tries (16 pts)

Cinderford District- Nil.

Unfortunately for Alec, his clever play was undone, although his side still emerged victorious.

The Gloucester Citizen 17th March 1911 named Alec as part of the Old Boys side:

*Gloucester Old Boys v. Five Way Old Edwardists. At Sandhurst (kick-off 3:30). Old Boys:...**Alec Lewis...***

The Gloucester Citizen 18th March 1911 mentions this selection:

An Unpleasant Game:

Of the many games played between Gloucester and Bristol, Saturday's contest at the County Ground was certainly one of the least interesting, and I regret to say, one of the most unpleasant...

Weak Back Play:

With the chances they had Gloucester should have won this game easily, especially with Maurice Neale off the field for nearly three parts of the match. Not the City three-quarter line gave a most disappointing display and never looked like scoring...The plain truth is Gloucester re badly off for three-quarters...

*There were six past and present Internationals in the selected Newport team to oppose Gloucester this afternoon...Gloucester have aggregated 400 points this season as against 150 by opponents. The Bristol game was the first draw played by the City...**Alec Lewis was selected to play for the Old Boys today.***

The Gloucester Citizen 1st April 1911 made mention of a soccer match Alec played as an alumnus of The Crypt School. Where the Gloucester Old Boys was composed of the three Gloucester boys' schools, this match was to be played between old boys of just The Crypt and Thomas Rich's Schools:

From WB's Note Book:

Old Boys' Match:

*An interesting Association Match will be played next Thursday at Denmark-road between Sir Thomas Rich's Old Boys and the School. Several well-known players will be seen on both sides, including...**Alec Lewis (Old Boys)**...The President of the Rich's Old Boys Association (Mr A.E. Allen) has kindly consented to kick-off at 4:15 p.m.*

The Gloucester Citizen 8th April 1911 reported on the match:

With the City Locals:

*The annual match between Sir Thomas Rich's School and Old Boys was played on the School ground in Denmark-road on Thursday. In the first half the Old Boys, who had the advantage of the wind, early pressed, and several strong runs were made...Play was confined for some time to the School half, and **Alec Lewis obtaining sent in a hard shot which the goalkeeper could not quite stop, thus putting Old Boys one up the lead being maintained until the interval.***

The Gloucester Citizen 22nd April 1911 briefly summarised Gloucester's previous season's performances, which Alec was praised for:

Gloucester:

An Arduous Season:

*...Other players who figured prominently in the third line were **Alec Lewis, H. Barnes...***

The Hull Daily Mail 18th April 1912 notes the death of Alec's mother's brother, at whose funeral he was a chief mourner. Alec must have had a close relationship with his uncle to attend his funeral in such fashion:

Late Mr R.H. Phillip:

Passing of Active Citizen:

*Much regret has been occasioned by the death which we announced on Monday of R.H. Phillip aged 70, of 447, Beverly-road...The funeral took place at the Hull General Cemetery on Wednesday. The chief mourners were: - Mrs Phillip (widow), Miss E. M. Phillip, Mr Rowland Phillip...**Mr Alec Lewis (nephew)***

A well-rounded sportsman, Alec was also a member of Gloucester Athletic Club. Established in 1880, Arthur William Vears (born 1849) was instrumental in the club's formative years. The Gloucester Citizen report at the end of the 1910-11 rugby season stated:

What the City want is some speedy and clever players in the three-quarter line. The suggestion that some of the men should do a bit of track running in the summer to pick up pace is a good one; it is understood running pumps will be provided if the players will only take the trouble to turn out.

Alec would have signed-up for this fitness course, held at the Athletic Club's Kingsholm ground. Alec also represented the Gloucester Athletic Club in cricket, which the Gloucester Journal 27th July 1912 reported:

Cricket:

Saturday's Local Matches:

*...Gloucester Athletic went down to Frampton in Mr Fielding's motor launch on Saturday, and brought off a good win against the villagers. The home men, batting first, were disposed of by A. Hudson (six for 24) and **Alec Lewis, who is home from Scotland on holiday (four for 27) for 60 runs.***

The match was played at The Green in Frampton-on-Severn; the longest Green in England, established in 1847. The match report also reveals that Alec had been holidays in Scotland, a popular English tourist destination of the time.

Later that year, Alec returned to playing rugby for Gloucester, as the Gloucester Journal 19th October 1912 recorded:

Football:

*Neath visited Kingsholm on Saturday, and provided the City with their fifth home victory, Gloucester winning by 1 dropped goal 1 try (7 points) to 1 try (3 points). **Alec Lewis dropped the goal and Hamblin scored the try- both clever efforts.***

Alec was praised for his kicking, of which he had been notable in previous appearances. The match was Gloucester's fifth home victory. Kingsholm had long drawn good crowds for the Gloucester team, which no doubt increased the side's morale.

The Gloucester Citizen 23rd November 1912, reported on a very important match between Gloucester and Oxford University; known as "The Varsity":

Today's Football:

Gloucester v. Oxford University:

*There are not many matches on the Gloucester Rugby Football Club's card which have caused so much anticipatory interest, speculation and conjecture as the meeting on Saturday at Kingsholm of Gloucester and Oxford University...There was a slight drizzle falling just before the game, but the gate was a good one...Gloucester- **Alec Lewis...***

The Game:

*...Then Varsity got off again at a tremendous pace, Williamson, Knott, Hands, Dingle and Steyn handling finely, but just when the later looked likely to go over **Alec Lewis dashed across and brought off a fine tackle.** Gloucester, however, were now on the defensive for a minute or two...but **Alec Lewis intercepted and dashed away. He was, however, overcome by numbers...***

Result:

Oxford- 3 goals (1d 1p) (12 points)

Gloucester- 1 try (3 points)

Against such tough opponents, Alec performed admirably, and Gloucester lost in fighting spirit. Alec had the opportunity to place Gloucester in another scoring position, but his pace outstripped that of his support and he had been overwhelmed by the defence. Nevertheless, a sizeable crowd turned out to watch the match despite the rain.

Alec represented Gloucester against Cinderford as the Gloucester Citizen 27th November 1912 records:

Football:

Gloucester v. Cinderford:

*The following team has been chosen to represent Gloucester v. Cinderford at Cinderford on Saturday; motor leaves Mr C. Williams', Westgate-street, at 1.0 sharp:...**Alec Lewis...***

Following his strong performances in the season so far, Alec was given the honour of playing for his county against Hampshire as a three-quarter. The Gloucester Citizen 3rd December 1912:

Gloucestershire v. Hampshire:

*The following team was chosen at Gloucester on Monday night to represent Gloucestershire v. Hampshire at Portsmouth on Saturday next: ...**Alec Lewis (Gloucester)**...*

The Western Daily Press 5th December 1912 reported on the match as well:

Football:

Rugby:

*Gloucestershire's task at Portsmouth is a heavy one, for the Service players generally convert Hampshire into a very powerful fifteen. The visitors will rely upon the following team: -...**Alec Lewis (Gloucester)**...*

However, at the same time, the South African team were touring Great Britain with an international match on the 4th January 1913 at Twickenham. This created vacancies in the county side as the international players were called upon to train with the English side. The Gloucestershire Chronicle 7th December 1912:

Clashing Fixtures:

*An effort was made to get the Gloucestershire and Hampshire match, to be played today at Portsmouth, postponed on account of the International trial match, but it was not successful and the 'Cestrians will have to do the best they can without Johnston, their International fullback...The vacancies in the Gloucestershire team caused by the International trial match have been filled as follows: -...**Alec Lewis (Gloucester)**...*

The Cheltenham Looker-On 7th December 1912 also mentioned the match:

Sports and Pastimes:

Football- The Cheltenham Rugby Football Club were unable to journey to Moseley last Saturday owing to frost, and today the Moseley team visit the Athletics Ground. Kick off at 3. A very nice game is expected.

*The following team has been selected to represent Gloucestershire in their match with Hants at Portsmouth today: - ...**Alec Lewis (Gloucester)**...*

The match was finally played as the Gloucestershire Chronicle 14th December 1912 wrote:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

*Owing to the calls of the English team, the Southside, and the County, the Gloucester fielded a very unrepresentative fifteen against their old and keen rivals, Stroud, at Kingsholm on Saturday. They were **without** W. Washbourne, **Alec Lewis**, J. Hamblin...*

A Famous Victory:

*With so many other leading players taking part in the England v. South game, it was a brilliant performance on the part of the Gloucestershire County team to beat Hampshire at Portsmouth, though only a point separated the teams at the finish...**Alec Lewis, the speedy Gloucestershire three-quarter, opened the scoring. He was given the ball in the Hampshire half by his club-mate, Norman***

Hayes, and darting between Owen and Royle, he quickly reached the line, well out...from Lewis's pass Washbourne dashed over the line with a pretty try.

The final scores, therefore, were:

Gloucestershire- 1 goal (p) 2 tries (9 points)

Hampshire- 1 goal 1 try (8 points)

All the scoring on the winners' side was done by Gloucestershire City players...Lewis, Hamblin and Washbourne were alert at three-quarter.

Alec had shone in his side's superb victory, scoring the first try of the match and giving Gloucestershire belief. He also set up Washbourne to try. Alec was making a name for himself in the County side and it was becoming better known amongst the rugby community. This was to serve his aspirations of representing Gloucestershire as a regular, in good stead.

The Gloucester Journal 11th January 1913 recounted:

Football:

South Africans Tour:

The South Africans concluded their tour in this country on Saturday, when they met and defeated England at Twickenham by 2 goals (p), 1 try (9 points), to 1 try (3 points). R. Poulton scored England's try. The record of the tour was: Played 26, won 23, lost 3. Points for, 403; against 96. Newport, Swansea, and London were the teams to beat the Springboks, who established a record for colonial combinations by winning all four International games and scoring 66 points to 3.

*Gloucester, though without Hudson, Washborne, Johns, Hayes, Smart (the last-named playing for England against the South Africans) beat Leicester on the latter's ground by 13 points to 8. This was Leicester's first home defeat of the season. Wilkes, L. Hamblin, and Pte. Nash (of the Gloucester Regiment) scored tries for Gloucester, and **Alec Lewis** dropped a goal.*

In front of 29,000 spectators, South Africa defeated England. The great Ronald William Poulton who later served with Alec in the Royal Berkshire Regiment, scored in this match. Alec had played a part in Gloucester's victory over Leicester in the same weekend, dropping a goal.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 1st February 1913 recounted a strong performance by Gloucester against Abertillery in Wales. Founded in 1883 and known as the "Green and Whites", Abertillery Rugby Football Club is one of the most famous Welsh sides:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

Beaten at 'Tillery:

*Gloucester took a pretty strong team to Abertillery on Saturday afternoon- the only absentees of note being Sig Smart, who was playing for England, and W. Washbourn who was nursing a damaged shoulder- and were not without hope of gaining their first win on Abertillery soil...Abertillery's dropped goal was the outcome of a good effort by Norris, who fielded the ball **from a kick by Lewis**...*

Gloucester were drawn to play Leicester at Kingsholm again, as the Gloucestershire Chronicle 8th February 1913 recounted in detail:

Sport and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

*A Brilliant Win- For the match between Gloucester and Leicester at Kingsholm, on Saturday, the weather was in its worst mood, rain falling heavily throughout the whole of the game, and the ground was in a sodden condition...Halford kicked off for Gloucester, and within five minutes of the start the 'Cestrians had a glorious chance to score but failed to turn it to account. Dix initiated a passing movement from the scrum and the ball was **splendidly handled by Wilkes, Hamblin and Lewis. The latter threw to Hudson, and the City Captain had an unopposed run in, but he missed the ball.** Gloucester, however, kept the visitors in their own half, and Cook just failed to land a penalty goal...the homesters succeeded in scoring again, and the movement which led up to the try was the finest seen on the Kingsholm ground for some time, and sent the spectators almost wild with delight. At the centre, Gloucester heeled and Dix fed Wilkes cleverly. The latter, using excellent judgment, slipped past Taylor and ran up to Tarr. He then yielded to **Alec Lewis, who shot ahead with Hudson on the right and Hamblin on the left. Lewis seemed certain to pass to the wing man (Hudson), and Lawrie and Tarr anticipated this. The transfer, however, went the reverse way to Hamblin, who took the ball beautifully, and raced home behind the posts. The same player converted.** This score absolutely settled the game, which ended immediately afterwards, leaving Gloucester the winners by two goals (1p) 1 try (1 pts) to Leicester 1 try (3 points).*

*Pontypool v. Gloucester- Gloucester journey to Pontypool today (Saturday) to meet the Welshman in the return game. The Pontypool men visited Kingsholm on December 21st and had the better of the 'Cestrians to the tune of twelve points to eight- three dropped goals to a goal and a penalty. They are putting a very strong team in the field this afternoon, and are likely to win. At the same time, I do not anticipate that they will have a runaway victory. The Gloucester team will be as follows: - C. Cook; A. Hudson, **A. Lewis...***

Alec's speed was utilised to deadly effect in this match being close to setting up two tries; one was spilled by the famous Arthur Hudson the captain. The article also mentioned Gloucester's upcoming match against Pontypool in Wales, which Gloucester were favourites to win.

During his rugby career, Alec was also active in the Gloucester dramatic circles. He was a veteran attendee of the Tetbury Amateur Operatic Society, and as testament to his abilities as a singer and actor, he was given the lead role in their performance of "The Emerald Isle". The Cheltenham Chronicle 22nd February 1913:

Tetbury Amateur Operatic Society:

*Local playgoers are eagerly looking forward to Easter week, "Tetbury Opera Week," when the Tetbury Amateur Operatic Society are presenting the comic opera "The Emerald Isle," at the Institute Hall. This will make the fourth successive production, the previous performances being "Pirates of Penzance," "Les Cloches de Corneville," and "Merrie England"... **Most of the principal parts are again in the hands of members who have played leading characters with much success in the previous operas produced by the society. The Earl of Newton, K.P. (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland), is to be played by Mr Alec Lewis...***

No doubt Alec would have been a member of The Crypt School musical program, and would have sung in the choir as a boy.

The Gloucester Journal 8th March 1913 records Gloucestershire's winning of the county championship:

Gloucestershire Win The Championship:

*At Carlisle on Saturday, Gloucestershire and Cumberland contested in the final for the County Championship, Gloucestershire gaining a handsome victory by 2 goals (1 p), 2 tries (14 points) to 1 try (3 points), L. Hamblin, L.H. Peckover, and C. Kingston scored tries for the winners and Hamblin converted one and also kicked a penalty goal. Oglethorpe scored for Cumberland, The game was keenly contested and the teams were level at the interval with three points each. With the wind in the second half the Westerners displayed superiority and the victory was well deserved. There was attendance of about 10,000 and the gate receipts amounted to £120, which, after payment of the team's expenses, will be equally divided between the two counties. Over 100 excursionists from Gloucester and district, made the long journey North to witness the match. The Gloucestershire team was as follows: B. Davy (Cheltenham); C. Kingston (Bristol University)...**Alec Lewis (Gloucester)** and G. Bowkett (Cinderford) accompanied the team as reserves.*

Alec was a reserve for this match, but travelled to Carlisle with the team.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 15th March 1913 records the match between Gloucester and Cinderford:

Gloucester v. Cinderford:

*Gloucester's visit to Cinderford today (Saturday) is looked forward to as a great financial help to Cinderford, as much as providing the Forest Rugbyites with a chance to see a good game. The visit of the City team has always furnished a fine exhibition of football, and will, it is expected, do so today. The feeling between the clubs has never been better than at present, and the Foresters are not likely to forget the generous and sportsmanlike way in which the City Club, players and officials have come to the aid of the Cinderford Club in their financial crisis...The Gloucester team has been chosen as follows: - C. Cook...**Alec Lewis**...the G.W.R. are issuing cheap tickets to Cinderford by the train leaving Gloucester at 1:53 p.m. The kick-off has been fixed for 3:30.*

Alec was to play in the side, and the Great Western Railway issued discounted tickets to Gloucester supporters that wished to support their team in Cinderford. It is noted that Gloucester had been particularly noble as sportsmen, and that the relationship between the two clubs was very amicable.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 5th April 1913, detailed the awards ceremony for the champion Gloucestershire side that had finished first in the 1912-1913 season:

Football Champions:

Complimentary Banquet:

At the Bell Hotel, Gloucester, on Thursday evening, the winning of the English Rugby Union County championship was celebrated by Gloucestershire Rugby enthusiasts, about 150 assembling to do honour to the players of the home county and also to the soldiers who represented the Gloucestershire Regiment last Saturday in the final tie of the Army Rugby Cup., when they were defeated by the Welsh Fusiliers by nine points to three. All the Gloucestershire M.P.'s were invited to attend, but only the city Member and Mr J.Y. Agg-Gardner (M.P. for Cheltenham) were able to be present. A strong contingent of Bristol, Clifton, and Cheltenham players and officials attended...The banquet was served in excellent style and during the repast Mr. Rowlands' band played a pleasing selection of music. One item of the choice menu, it might be mentioned, was "Kingsholm pudding." Every guest was presented with a red and white rosette- the colours of the Gloucestershire team...They were for the second time the County Champions of England. In 1910-11 Gloucestershire

also attained that great honour when out of five matches played only one was lost. But in 1912-13 they went one better. They had not lost any match (applause). Gloucestershire had won the championship twice in four years, and next year he hoped that they would make it three times in five years (loud applause)...They also had with them that evening the members of the Gloucestershire Regiment Rugby Football team- one of the best in the British service- and he should like to congratulate them on reaching the final of the Army Cup competition. A year ago they reached the semi-final, and in addition to the championship matches (five), they played 18 games, of which thirteen were won...They were proud of their Regimental team, because they were a splendid side of Englishmen, playing the grand old national game, like sportsmen, like Englishmen, ready to take defeat, but hoping and seeking for victory (Applause)... **The Chairman then presented medals to the members of the Gloucestershire team to commemorate their success as follows:** W.J. Johnston, Lionel Hamblin, Gordon Vears, C.H. Kingston, W. Washbourne, A. Hall, J. Baker, **Alec Lewis**, A. Redding, J. Watkins, L.H. Peckover and Norman Hayes- W. Johns, B. Davy, Stanley Cook and W. Bradshaw were unable to attend the banquet...The chairman afterwards stated that he had a unique presentation to make to Mr. Gordon Vears, the acting captain, viz., the ball which was used in the County Championship final. The ball was inscribed as follows: - "E.R.U County Championship. Final Match. Cumberland v. Gloucestershire. At Carlisle. March 1st 1913. Won by Gloucestershire, 14 points to 3. Gordon Vears, Captain."

Alec was presented with his medal as a member of the side, although he was reserve for the final match. The side had not lost a match that season, and the victory was the second time in fourty years that Gloucestershire had won the championship. Alec's presentation was echoed in the Gloucester Journal 7th June 1913 which held the annual Gloucestershire Committee Report:

Glo'stershire Rugby Football Union:

Committee's Report:

...The players in the "final" were awarded medals, as were also W.R. Johnston and Alec Lewis...

Ever the sportsman, a fortnight later Alec competed in the Evesham Regatta as the Gloucestershire Chronicle 17th May 1913 illuminated:

Rowing:

*At Evesham Regatta, on Monday...In the preliminary heats the Gloucester crew- **A.H.T. Lewis**...beat the Notts Union R.C. by a length after a gruelling race, and Stourport R.C. by a length after a good race...*

Gloucester had performed strongly at the meet. The Gloucester Journal 17th May 1913 continued the praise:

Evesham Regatta:

Gloucester Crews in Two Finals:

*At Evesham Regatta on Monday the President's Prize for junior scullers was won by R.T. Farnsworth, Notts Union R.C. The Eyres Monsell Plate for maiden fours went to Nottingham R.C., who in the final, with the inside station, **beat Gloucester R.C.- A.H.T. Lewis...by 1 ¾ lengths...***

The article reveals that Gloucester were beaten in the final by Nottingham by a fair margin. Being one of the oldest clubs in Great Britain, Gloucester had always been a strong team, and the 1913 season was no different.

Football fever began in the September of 1913, and the Gloucestershire Chronicle 6th September 1913 discussed the city side with keen anticipation of the season ahead:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

*Gloucester's Practice- Once again the football season is at hand and the merits and demerits of the Gloucester Club and their opponents are discussed. A practice game fixed for Tuesday night and included in the thirty or so players...**Alec Lewis**...Hudson was a downright good captain; Holford was a very hard man to follow, and if the team is to win matches, he must have the whole-hearted support of the players. **Alec Lewis has been elected vice-captain, and a more capable player could not be found.***

Alec was given the vice-captaincy of the Gloucester side in the coming season, which was to be his most successful with the club.

Gloucester gave a strong performance in their victory over Moseley at Kingsholm. The Gloucestershire Chronicle 27th September 1913:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

*Gloucester defeated Moseley, at Kingsholm, on Saturday, by 1 goal 3 tries (14 points) to nil. It was the first visit of Moseley since November 21st 1896, when Gloucester won my 1 goal 1 try (8 points) to nil...About twenty minutes after the start, however, Gloucester heeled, and Baker initiated a passing movement from the scrum. After Albert Hall, **Alec Lewis** and Lionel Hamblin had handled, the latter fed Washbourne, who made off down touch with Hamblin on his right...Gloucester, playing with the strong sun behind them, at once attacked in the second half, but with the line at his mercy, a forward knocked on. Then following good work by Baker and Hall, **Lewis received, and, after touching down, was called back for a forward pass**...Then came the only decent passing movement of the match. It was splendidly combined movement in which the ball was easily handled. Washbourne made the desired opening and fed **Lewis. The latter gave to Web**, who crossed with a splendid try...The final whistle went with Gloucester winners by 14 points.*

*Coming after their splendid display against the 1st Gloucestershire Regiment, the exhibition of the City team must be regarded as greatly disappointing- it was a repetition of the game with Bream...Owing to the forwards giving a disappointing display, the Gloucester backs were put off their game. Very seldom indeed did they receive the leather from their halves, and they were compelled to wait for it to be kicked to them by the opposition or pick it up from somebody's feet. This naturally accounted for the very few passing movements the City team were able to bring off, and which so delight the spectators...**Alec Lewis, who acted as captain, was, as usual, the pick of the home three-quarters**, but all did well under the circumstances, especially Washbourne at left centre, when Hamblin was carried off.*

Alec played for Gloucestershire against Devon in the County Championship as the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 1st November 1913 alludes:

Devon v. Gloucestershire:

The match between Devon and Gloucestershire, at Gloucester, this afternoon, in connexion with the County Championship, has aroused considerable interest...

Teams: -

*Gloucestershire- ...three-quarters...**Alec Lewis**...*

The next mention of Alec's name appeared in the Gloucestershire Echo 3rd January 1914, which revealed that he had injured his shoulder:

Gloucester v. Leicester:

*Gloucester had Leicester as opponents at Kingsholm this afternoon, and it was unfortunate for the visitors that their ranks were weakened through four of their best players...Gloucester were without **Alec Lewis**, who is still suffering from an injured shoulder...*

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 3rd January 1914 described his situation in more detail:

An Even Game:

*Narrow though the margin between the teams was- and only a penalty goal at that- the better side won. I give all credit to the Garden Towners for the sporting fight they put up, and although h the game was not exactly scientific, it as clean and robust, crammed with thrills. The City three's were the more finished quartette, and were always ready to seize their opportunities. It was only the visitors' smart defensive work that saved a larger score. Washbourne was well-marked by Gange. Hamblin was easily the best player on the field, and it was only by ill-luck that he did not score on several occasions. In consequence of his injury the day previous, **Alec Lewis** did not turn out and Sysum took his place. He did his best, but Webb missed his usual partner.*

It appears that Alec may have injured his shoulder during training on the 2nd January; Sysum was actually Alec's brother-in-law as Alec's older brother Percival, married Eliza Sysum. The injury was not serious as the Gloucestershire Chronicle 31st January 1914 records Alec as setting up a try for Gloucester against Garden Town:

Sports and Pastimes:

Notes on Clubs and Games:

*The Rubber Match- There was a large crows present at Kingsholm last Saturday when the Garden Towners provided the opposition to the City fifteen. The only change in the home team was that Ayliffe came in for Saunders in the front...**Alec Lewis initiated a scoring movement**, which was made pretty by the cleverness of Sysum.*

The Gloucestershire Echo 6th February 1914 mentioned Alec's lead role in the "Lady of Ostend" presented by the Tetbury Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society:

Theatricals at Tetbury:

*Very considerable interest was taken locally in the Tetbury Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of "The Lady of Ostend" ...The following was the cast, all the members of which acquitted themselves admirably: -...**Baron de Longueville. Mr. Alec Lewis**...*

Cheltenham Chronicle 7th February 1914 made a note of this too:

Theatricals at Tetbury:

*Very considerable interest was taken locally in the Tetbury Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of "The Lady of Ostend:...The following was the cast, all members of which acquitted themselves admirably: - ...**Mr Alec H. Lewis**...*

During this time, Alec played for the city side against Pontypool as the Western Mail 6th February 1914 reported:

Gloucester v. Pontypool:

*At Gloucester on Saturday. Gloucester (selected from):...**Alec Lewis**...*

Alec had a hand at three-quarter, in Gloucester's win over Northampton as the Gloucestershire Echo 28th March 1914 recounted:

Today's Football:

Glo'ster v. Northampton:

*The visit of the Northampton team to Kingsholm has for many seasons been a good attraction, and additional interest was taken in Saturday afternoon's fixture by reason of the fact that Northampton is the only English team that has beaten the Cesstrians this season, the final score in their favour being three tries to one. With the intention of reversing the result, Gloucester fielded a strong side, the only absentees being Washbourne and Webb. **Alec Lewis** and Clark again appeared in the three-quarter line. Northampton had a good side out and were fully expected to give the home team a close game. The weather conditions were very favourable and the ground was in exceptional condition. Teams: - ...**Alec Lewis** three-quarters...*

Final:

Gloucester- 2 goals, 2 tries (16 pts)

Northants- Nil

The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer 11th April 1914 observed Gloucester's loss in front of a large crowd, to Headingley at Kingsholm:

Rugby Union:

Headingley v. Gloucester: Visitor's Delightful Exhibition:

At Gloucester yesterday, before 3,000 spectators, Headingley commenced their Easter tour, and met Gloucester, after an interval of four seasons...

Result:

Headingley- 1 goal 4 tries (17 points)

Gloucester- 1 dropped goal (4 points)

*Teams: - C. Cook, back **Alec Lewis**...three-quarter backs*

The Gloucestershire Echo 27th June 1914 interestingly detailed the ascension of Alec's brother Thomas, to treasurer of the Old Boys' club:

Old Boy's R.F.C:

Annual Meeting:

*The annual meeting of members of the Gloucester Old Boy's Rugby Football Club was held at the Avenue Hotel on Friday evening. The president of the club (Mr G.F. Collett) was in the chair, and was supported by Mr. L. Price (hon. Secretary) and **Mr T.H.R. Lewis (hon. Treasurer)***

Thomas had been a student of The Crypt School and had quite evidently followed in his older brother's distinguished footsteps.

Alec and other politically minded individuals of the time would have been well aware of the international friction that had built up in Europe. On the 28th June 1914, a young Yugoslavian nationalist Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand; the catalyst for a series of events known as the July Crisis. With Germany failing to recognise the neutrality of Belgium, Britain sent her troops in to support Belgium and France as per the Treaty of London 1839. On the 4th August, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith declared the commencement of hostilities against Germany. Alec's Conservative Party was partnered with the Liberal party of which Asquith headed, and formed an all-party coalition to govern Britain during the war.

Almost immediately after, hundreds of thousands of British men enlisted to fight for their empire. The Gloucester Journal 15th August 1914 posted the following advertisement:

The 5th Gloucesters:

Capt. S.S. Champion, Officer Commanding the Depot of the 5th Gloucester Regiment, the Barracks, Gloucester, writes us as follows:-

I have the honour to inform you that the 5th Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, is up to full strength. All men between the ages of 17 and 35 wishing to join this Battalion are requested to apply to me at once, personally or by letter, so that their names and addresses may be placed on a waiting list. All applicants should give their age, previous military experience (if any), and also state whether they are willing to undertake liability to serve abroad in the event of national emergency.

This paragraph summed up the stringent and naïve process of vetting volunteers at the start of the Great War. Within a year, mass enlistment was in full swing and supply could not meet demand. On the 15th August 1914, the 5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment paraded in Swindon Park asking for volunteers to fight overseas. Those that accept the call, received a £5 gratuity from H.M. Exchequer, and joined in a celebration at the Cricketers Arms Hotel in the evening. The following day, the battalion left for Hockliffe, Bedfordshire, and was billeted in barns and stables. On the 19th August 1914, the battalion left Hockliffe on foot, in an 80 mile march to Chelmsford where the battalion was to be stationed to guard the East Coast against a German invasion and to train. W.J. Wood in his memoirs *With the Fifth Gloucesters at Home and Overseas*, recorded the following:

Aug. 16th - Battalion left for Hockliffe, Bedfordshire and was billeted in stables and barns. Signallers dropped their kits at Church Farm. Rev. G.F. Helm joined the Battalion as Padre, complete with straw hat. Jolly good chap.

Aug. 19th - Left Hockliffe on foot for Chelmsford (an 80 mile march), where it was intended that the Battalion should be stationed for the double purpose of guarding the East Coast and of training, preparatory to going abroad.

Aug. 20th - First stage of our journey reached at Hitchin. Billeted here for the night.

Aug. 21st - On again and reached Hertford by sunset. Bivouacked in the meadows.

Aug. 22nd - Arrived at Waltham Cross.

Aug. 23rd - Beautiful day. Marched on through Epping Forest to Chipping Ongar.

Aug. 24th - Entered Chelmsford at 11am very footsore and cooled our heels 'neath the trees in Admirals Park. Billeted with Arch Bennett, Don Hart, and Fred Reeves in the vicinity of Primrose Hill. Don did not agree with our fractious host, whom he dubbed a 'Presbyterian washout.'

Aug. 25th-29th - TRAINING.

Aug. 30th - Battalion Church Parade, St. Mary's Cathedral.

Aug. 31st - Removed to fresh billett - 'Clovelly', Maltese Road, where Bill Bracher and Macdonnel were already in residence.

Alec, being a sportsman and perhaps seeking another game to chance his hand at, promptly attested. The Birmingham Gazette 1st September 1914:

Football Recruits:

Gloucester footballers continue to join the ranks. In addition to those already mentioned, **Alec Lewis**, F. Webb, W. Dix, F. Ayliffe, E. Osborne and J. Harris are stated to have enrolled, and W. Wilkes and W. Parham are waiting to be medically examined. Amongst local players, three brothers of Lionel Hamblin, **two brothers of Alec Lewis**, E. Ruck, and several others have rallied to the flag. To their great disappointment one or two men failed to pass the medical test owing to varicose veins.

It is noted that almost all of the Gloucester Rugby side enlisted in the first two weeks of the drive for volunteers. The Western Daily 3 September 1914:

Gloucester City Council:

The War Distress:

The Deputy Mayor, in stating that the Education Committee were recommended to act in accordance with the memorandum of the Local Government School, mentioned that one of the elementary school assistant masters in the city (Mr Day of Calton Road), who served with great distinction in South Africa, had been sent for to the War Office, and had been at once appointed as Captain in H.M. Forces for special service; **and two other assistant masters (Mr Smith of Widden Street, and Mr Alec Lewis, of Tredworth- a county football player)- were also going on active service. (Applause.)**

The Red Cross placed a request in the Gloucester Journal 5th September 1914, for more shirts to issue to the soldiers as comforts. Alec's mother is noted as having taken part in the drive to produce these:

Gloucester Red Cross Working Parties:

Men's flannel day shirts are urgently wanted. These should be made of good quality Army flannel, with narrow calico collar bands and metal buttons; size of collar 16 ½ inches when fastened. Knitted socks (with heels) are also needed; length of foot 11 or 12 inches. "House-wives" filled with buttons, needles, etc. are also required. These should be sent to barrack Square on Tuesdays and Fridays between 10 and 12. During the week ending Saturday, August 29th, completed garments have been received from the following...Mrs F.E. Smith, **Mrs Lewis (Ryecroft working party)**...

The Gloucesters in Action:

In the course of his report of an interview which the Southampton correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" had with some of the wounded landed at the port, en route for Netley Hospital...The

Germans were as thick as bees. They marched and fought in close formation, and so offered an easy target.

Alec's younger brothers Tom and Melville had also enlisted, and along with Alec himself, were placed in the 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment. This battalion contained no fewer than eighteen members of the Gloucester rugby club.

Alec's Army Form E. 624 was issued by J.G. Linley, and was signed on the 12th September 1914 at Chelmsford Station, although he attested and embarked on the 31st August 1914. At the age of 27 years and 8 months, like many others he had no prior military experience. The Army gave him the service number 2693, the rank of Private and assigned him, along with his brothers, to "F" Company 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment. Pte 2693 A.H.T. Lewis 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment was now a fully-fledged member of the Territorial Army, oblivious of the terrors that lay ahead of him.

The 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment was a Territorial Unit of the British Army. When war broke out, the men had just departed for their annual summer bivouac, and were swiftly recalled to Gloucester. The wartime unit was raised in August 1914, in Gloucester as part of the South Midland Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division. On the 5th August 1914, the unit mobilised for war service taking up station on the Isle of Wight to the south of England.

Soon afterwards, the battalion moved to Swindon in Wiltshire, and then to Maldon in Essex on the 12th and 13th August 1914. This is where it would remain to practise trench warfare with the rest of the 48th Division. On the 14th October, Alec would have had his first glimpse of royalty, as His Majesty King George V inspected the 48th Division. The men would have spent some time cleaning their boots and uniforms which consisted of: a peaked service cap with a badge on the front and the back, a full-length khaki tunic buttoned to the neck with webbing at the waist, matching khaki trousers bound below the knee with khaki puttees, and black hobnailed boots.

Wood wrote of the period:

Sept. 2nd - The South Midland Brigade concentrated at Hylands Park (3 miles outside Chelmsford) and was inspected by General Sir Ian Hamilton.

Sept. 5th - Route march (14 miles). En route the Battalion made a flank attack on farmhouses with fixed bayonets. Sergt. Richards, the Provost Sergeant, executed a fine sprint across a turnip field with his knees in the air, at the head of his platoon.

Sept. 6th - Church Parade at the Cathedral. Brigade-Chaplain preached.

Sept. 8th - Route march (12 miles). Attached to "C" and "D" Companies with Don Hart as Signallers.

Sept. 9th-23rd - Battalion training of an extensive character. Great signalling "Stunts" in Admirals Park.

Sept. 24th - Innoculated against typhoid fever.

Sept. 25th - Day off by virtue of said inoculation.

Sept. 26th-Oct. 3rd - Signal Section did much good work with Morse and Semaphore in Admirals Park. The afternoons were usually devoted to "buzzer" practice.

Oct. 4th - Church Parade at St. Mary's Cathedral. Preacher - The Bishop of Gloucester (Dr. Gibson).

Oct. 5th - Battalion marched to Dunmow (8 and half miles) and took up a defensive position in a farmyard and awaited "enemy." The latter's attack repulsed in the afternoon.

Oct. 6th - Marched back to Chelmsford. During the afternoon Battalion took part in Brigade Ceremonial Drill in Hylands Park. Our tubby Brigadier's face was a study in scarlet.

Oct. 12th-13th - Trenching operations.

Oct. 14th - The South Midland Division was inspected by HM THE KING at Hylands Park. The Division numbered over 15,000 on parade. Royal Salute and March Past.

Some of the exercises seemed almost comical to Wood and he writes about them with an innocence that had not yet bore witness to the horrors that he was being trained to protect himself from.

Alec was given his first vaccination on the 26th September 1914, and his second on the 21st October 1914. The Gloucester Journal 26th September 1914 published Alec's account of daily life in training:

"Soldiering a Very Fine Life":

Gloucester Footballers as Happy as Sandboys:

Acknowledging the very many thanks a parcel of cigarettes, sent for distribution amongst the Gloucester football "boys" with the 5th Gloucesters, Pte. Alec Lewis writes: - "Such gifts are deeply appreciated, especially when luxuries such as jam, eggs, butter, fruit and tomatoes, have to be bought out of 7s. a week. Washing, too, has to be paid for, so that a precious small margin is left for tobacco and other enjoyments which can only be had for money. The 'boys' are trying to get their footer kit, especially as the 'Bucks' have challenged us. They, it is reported, have four Internationals, including Poulton, but for the truth of that I cannot vouch. We can put a fine team in the field selected from the following: - C. Cook; Webb, Lewis, Sysum (or Hamblin), and Washbourne; Wilked, Sysum (or Hamblin); Smart, Parham, Meadows, Millard, Ayliffe, A. Cook, Harris, Dovey, Kingscote, Osborne, Cummings, and many other excellent reserves. Most of the Old Boys, including my brothers, are in F Co. In spite of the hard work, we are all as happy as sandboys. The fellows were congratulated by the 'Colours' on the excellent progress they have made. All are exceptionally keen. The fact that, as far as I know, not one of the recruits has yet had 'pack drill' speaks well for their good behaviour. Pack drill means parading in full kit (weighing pretty well 60lbs.) for an hour or more, according to offence. Taking it altogether, soldiering is a very fine life." In a postscript Pte. Lewis hopes the committee of the Gloucester F.C. will be able to arrange to send the "boys" their kit. We understand the request has already been considered by the Committee, and on receiving notice from the Commanding Officer that the men will be allowed to play football matches, the kit will be forwarded to a responsible individual.

Even in the time of great national peril, Alec and his Gloucester Rugby compatriots were eager to continue playing football. The atmosphere amongst the men was relaxed and innocent, and there was a widespread and genuine belief that the war would be over before Christmas. Late October and November 1914, saw a period of marches to Dunmow and Dunslake, where military exercise were undertaken. A live firing range in Sandown was used by the men to practise the use of their Lee-Enfield .303's.

Wood wrote in his diary for the period:

Oct. 15th - Night operations, and practised attacking with feline stealth.

Oct. 16th - Second dose of inoculations administered.

Oct. 17th - Stayed in Billett nursing a "fat" head.

Oct. 20th - Route march (12 miles). 3rd Battery Royal Field Artillery arrived and was stationed at Broomfield.

Oct. 22nd - My 19th birthday.

Oct. 27th - Route march (15 miles)

Oct. 28th - Marched to Sandown Range for the purpose of firing Musketry Course. Terrible weather prevailed. The targets were partially obscured by the driving rain.

Oct. 29th-30th - Further excursions to Sandown Range. Magpies very plentiful!

Oct. 31st - Medical examination by Dr. Sprague. "A" Company played "B" Company at Rugby. Result,

On the 24th October 1914, Alec is pictured in the Chelmsford Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic:

With the 5th Gloucesters at Chelmsford:

The 5th Battalion Gloucester Regiment (Territorials) at Chelmsford are now considered efficient, and are busy on brigade work. Last week they were practising entrenching, and after making the trenches, spent two nights and days in them, evidently a process of hardening the men for active service...

*3- A group on parade. A is Pvt. Knight an Oxford Double Blue, and winner of the Battalion 5 miles (cross country), 3 miles, and 1 mile championships; **B is Alec Lewis, the Gloucester three-quarter...***

The list of County and City footballers in the 5th Gloucesters alone was impressive, let alone those from other areas of Britain. These men were used as an example by the British propaganda machine, to inspire other young men to enlist. As a poster of the time read:

"This is not the time to play games" (Lord Roberts)

Rugby Union Footballers are Doing Their Duty over 90% have enlisted.

"Every player who represented England in Rugby international matches last year has joined the colours" Extract from The Times, November 30, 1914.

British Athletes! Will you follow this Glorious Example?

Wood's diary recounts:

Nov. 3rd - Route march (16 miles)

Nov. 6th - Route march (20 miles)

Nov. 9th - Battalion marched to Felsted (10 miles) and took part in Field Operations.

Nov. 11th-27th - Intensive Signal Training in Admirals Park.

Nov. 28th - Went to London for the day with Jim Tuck (affectionately known as "The Friar"). Visited the Tower. In the evening we dropped in the Alhambra and saw the Revue "Not Likely."

Nov. 30th - Field Operations.

Dec. 4th - Route march (16 miles)

Dec. 5th - The Battalion Rugby Football team, which consisted of practically the whole of the Gloucester Rugby Football Club, played the Canadian Western Horse at Queen's Clubm London, winning 48-0.

Dec. 17th - Left Chelmsford on my Foreign Service Leave.

Dec. 22nd - Returned to Chelmsford.

Dec. 25th - Spent Christmas Day with Artillery friends - George Woodcock, Howard Sanigar, and others at their billet at Broomfield.

The 5th Gloucesters spent Christmas in Chelmsford, and on the 29th December 1914, Alec was promoted to Lance-Corporal (unpaid). This was a substantive rank, which provided Alec the pay of a private with the seniority of a Lance-Corporal.

The 1/5th Gloucesters played numerous football matches against military sides, none being more memorable than their 49-0 drubbing of a newly arrived Canadian Western Horse side on the 5th

December 1914 at the Queen's Club, Kensington. Granted that tries were only worth three points, to win by such a margin was no mean feat.

The Gloucester Journal 2nd January 1915 reported on the progress of the war, as well as a curious rugby match played within the Gloucestershire Regiment at Chelmsford:

Wounded Gloucesters at Bristol:

Some German Tricks:

Amongst the 120 wounded soldiers who arrived by special ambulance train from Southampton, at midnight the "Western Daily Press" representative found a number of Bristol men who had seen much of the fighting in the trenches along the battle front.

Private Tucker of the Gloucestershire Regiment, of Easton, was partially buried by the earth thrown up by a huge German shell, and was suffering from shock.

Private Andrews, Gloucestershire Regiment, of Bedminster, was wounded by a bullet at La Bassee.

A South Wales Borderer described an action in which his regiment took part on the 21st July. There were 17,000 or 18,000 troops in the fight, including the Borderers, the Gloucesters, the Welsh, and the Munsters. The German trenches were charged and our regiments lost heavily in both officers and men. The Germans pick off our officers continually, and then turn their attention to the non-coms, said one man. This particular action followed upon a long march by some of the regiments, but our fellows fought with terrible effect on the Germans, particularly when the latter were retiring. The Germans, said another soldier, are not content with charging a rifle only now, but advance with a grenade or bomb, which they throw towards the British lines and retire. Then they charge with the bayonet. Another favourite trick is to dig deep holes in their own trenches beneath the water. When the British charge them out and jump into the evacuated trenches some of our men disappear into these death traps.

Lieut. Brewer and The Christmas Truce:

Lieutenant C.H. Brewer writes from the trenches: - Just a line to let you know how I spent one of the most remarkable Christmas Days it would be possible to have. I can't say I wouldn't have missed it for worlds, for I would have given anything to have spent it amongst you all in Gloucester..... We came into the trenches again on Christmas Eve. It was a lovely night, frosty and a clear half-moon. When we got here we found there was a telegraph fixed up between here and headquarters, and as there was no one to work it, I worked it for about a couple of hours. We all stayed up till after 12 and wished each other "A merry Christmas and a better one next year." The Germans were singing and playing mouth organs hard all Christmas Eve. Just opposite us they have got a Christmas tree stuck up on the parapet. Early on Christmas morning they shouted across to us "A merry Christmas!" and asked if some of us would go half-way and meet them. We did, and it was the most extraordinary sight I have ever seen to see English and German soldiers shaking hands and exchanging cigars and cigarettes between the trenches. One of them gave me a cigar, but I did not smoke it as I was rather suspicious of them at the time. Not a shot was fired all day, and everybody walked about on top of the trenches. The same happened yesterday, but today we have kept in our trenches, although no shots have been exchanged. They said they would not fire on us till we fired on them, but we are keeping a very careful look out. They were most of them a miserable-looking lot, and some looked awful. They had a sickly yellowish-green colour in their cheeks which made them look as if they had lived underground for some time. Higher up the line- you would scarcely believe it- but they were kicking a football about between the trenches. But perhaps the funniest sight was when a hare was

started between the lines, to see English and German soldiers running after this hare as if their lives depended on it; but in spite of all this, you can "bet your boots" we were keeping a very sharp look out.

Military Football:

Another Victory For The 5th Gloucesters:

The 5th Batt. Gloucester Regiment met a combined team of the 4th and 6th Battalions at Chelmsford on Saturday. The Fifts made a change in the team that played the Canadians, Cummings playing half vice Sysum, who took Hamblin's place in the three-quarter line. The ground was very greasy, and good back play was out of the question. The 4th and 6th fielded a good side, which included several well-known Bristol players. The 5th took up the attack soon after the start, and after about ten minutes' play, C. Cook landed a splendid penalty goal. The 5ths still kept up the pressure, and from a scrum near the line Cummings got over with an unconverted try. Play after this was much more even and very fast, and the tackling was keen. The 4th and 6th team played up strongly, and kept the 5ths defence, for whom Alec Lewis was very conspicuous, fairly busy. Wookey (Bristol) showed up prominently for the 4th and 6th. Half-time arrived with the score 6 points to nil in favour of the 5ths.

After the interval, lay was still very keen and exciting, and greatly enjoyed by a good crowd. Cook, at back for the 5ths, was very sound, and his kicks to touch were of great benefit to his side. The 4th and 6th came very near scoring on several occasions, but the 5ths defence held out. Towards the end they again took up the attack, but were met by a very resolute defence, and it was not until the last few minutes that Cummings, working the blind side of the scrum, gave F. Webb a nice pass, for the latter to beat the 4th and the full-back easily and cross with a very good try. C. Cook failed to convert. No-side arrived just afterwards, and the 5ths came out winners of an exceptionally good game.

Result:

5th Gloucesters- 1 goal (p) 2 tries (9 pts)

4th and 6th Gloucesters-nil.

Unsurprisingly, the 1/5th Gloucesters with their experienced side, emerged victorious in this match. Alec had been excellent in defence; his fitness proving itself.

Wood recounted of the next weeks:

Jan. 11th - Brigade Field Operations

Jan. 13th - Brigade route march (24 miles). Oh the pain!!!

Jan. 16th - Billeting area re-arranged. Found very desirable quarters at 37 Duke Street.

Jan. 17th - My Artillery friends gave farewell dinner at Broomfield.

Jan. 18th - Signal Section Dinner at Cedar Hotel.

Jan. 24th - Invited to tea at Widford Rectory by Rev. Thurlow.

Jan. 25th - Heavy fall of snow.

Jan. 26th - With Reg. Burton in Signalling stunt from top of hay rick at Chignal Smealey. Early in the evening Capt. V.N. Johnson (the Adjutant) took a small party of signallers (including myself) out to a point on the main road at Boreham for the purpose of searching passing motor cars for secret signalling apparatus or wireless, by which we believed Zeppelins were aided. Several cars held up at point of loaded rifle and searched but nothing suspicious was discovered.

On the 1st February 1915, the battalion was reorganised into four companies; A,B,C,D. On the 24th February 1915, the Battalion took part in a field firing exercise on the snow-covered downs which involved advancing and dropping to fire in a prone position. The men were exhausted and freezing after the exercise.

Over this period of training, the men had been playing an inter-company competition within the 1/5th Gloucesters. The Gloucester Journal 13th March 1915, recounts the final between Alec's "C" Company and "D" Company:

Military Football:

5th Gloucesters:

Rugby Cup Final At Chelmsford.

The final round of the inter-company competition took place at Chelmsford on Saturday. The two companies which had successfully reached the final were D and C. Both teams were fully represented, the only notable absentee being Pte. L. Hamblin from D Company's ranks. Some bright and open football was witnessed, although it was somewhat marred at times by a strong wind blowing down the ground. The first half was mostly in favour of D Company, Pte. H. Pollard scoring a try, which was converted by Pte. S. Sysum. C Company enjoyed the benefit of the wind. The second half was productive of some good football, D Company doing all the attacking. Tries were scored by Lance-Corpl. S. Millard and Pte. A. White. There was tremendous excitement throughout the game, both sides showing exceptional keenness. D Company finally won by 1 goal 2 tries (11 points) to nil. Lance-Corpl. Alec Lewis was unfortunately injured during the second half and had to leave the field. The cup was presented to Pte. W. Egerton (captain of D Company) by Captain G.F. Collett (A Company), who also was the kind donor of the cup. The winners were represented by the following: - Pte. H. Smith; Pte. C. Romans, Pte. H. Pollard, Pte. S. Sysum, and Pte. W. Washbourn; Pte. E. Cummings and Pte. W. Egerton (capt.); Pte. J. Harris, Pte. A. White, Corporal Thompson, Lance-Corpl. S. Millard, Pte. P. Blunt, Pte. C. Jonhston, Pte. G. Lane and Pte. W. Dovey.- Referee: Capt. G.F. Collett.- C Company had some good players in their ranks, including the Brothers Lewis and F. Webb.

5th Gloucesters v. Artillery at Northampton:

On Saturday, at Northampton, teams representing the 2nd 1st S.M. Gloucester Artillery and the 2nd 5th Gloucesters met in Abingdon Park, resulting in a win for the 5ths by 4 tries (12 points) to nil. The teams were captained respectively by Second-Lieut. Unwin and Private W. Johns. Johns won the toss, and Lieut.-Colonel Metford kicked off before a large crowd of men who had come to watch their comrades play. Playing down a hill, the 5ths were soon pressing, and shortly after the commencement Corporal Yend opened the scoring by getting over in a loose rush. The place-kick failed. After more play on the Artillery 25 a strong break through by a 5th three-quarter, which looked like a sure score, went wrong owing to the ball being dropped just outside the line, a minor only resulting. The 5ths again attacked, and after good passing their right wing just missed a score, being pushed into touch-in-goal. The remainder of the first half was contested in the Artillery territory, but no further score was obtained. Early in the second half Private Johns, profiting by a mistake of an opponent, picked up about 10 yards out and dashed over. The kick again failed. The 5th continued to show their superiority, and after a good passing movement Private Mills (an old Gloucester Schoolboy International) ran over near the posts, no goal resulting. For some time now the Artillery appeared to better advantage, pressing the 5ths back on to their goal-line, where they kept them penned, but were unable to score, a minor only resulting. The 5ths were not to be denied, and after

working up the field the Artillery back was tackled in possession and from the loose play following Corporal Ponting got possession and scored, no goal resulting. In justice to the goal kickers, it should be stated that though under ordinary circumstances the positions were not difficult, owing to the excessively strong cross-wind accurate kicking was impossible...

Alec had been injured during the match, possibly to the same shoulder that he had encountered trouble with in previous years.

Wood made the following observations:

Feb. 1st - The Battalion formerly was made up of 8 Companies - 2 from Gloucester, 2 from Cheltenham, and 1 each from Stroud, Dursley, Tewkesbury, and from the North Cotswolds. All the officers and practically all the men had been born and bred in Gloucestershire, and constituted the "flower" of the County. By this time the Battalion had been organised into its 4 Company system, drafted to full strength, trained and disciplined. The 48th (South Midland) Division concentrated and were inspected by General Sir Ian Hamilton.

Feb. 10th - Route march (18 miles)

Feb. 22nd - Further rapid telephone experiments under the guidance of Capt. Stuart. The idea was to connect up a chain of stations by telephone in the quickest possible time.

Feb. 23rd - Entrained at Dunstable, where the Battalion had to complete a course of field firing. A heavy fall of snow took place the same evening.

Feb. 24th - Battalion marched to the Downs for field firing. Snow was 3 inches deep, and on this cold and subsequently sloppy carpet we wallowed, fired ball cartridges at iron plates 2 and 300 yards distant, got up, made a dash through the slush: down again, and so on. Waves of men in front firing and line upon line of fellows following up at the rear.

Feb. 25th - Left for Chelmsford. Arrived 9.30pm.

Feb. 27th - Billeting area again re-arranged.

Alec would have had his fitness and willpower tested on the 24th February 1915 at Sandown in the rigorous and tiring training through awful conditions.

Through March, Wood's diary gives an insight into the harsh training regime that the Territorials endured:

Mar. 2nd - A night stunt at Boreham Rifle Range.

Mar. 3rd - Signal Section out at night with lamps (Signalling) Mark II. After wading through the muddiest portions of Admirals Park, and having reached a remote shed, our rendezvous, the discovery was made that no oil had been put in the lamps.

Mar. 5th - Brigade held operations.

Mar. 10th - Map reading test. The section paired off, each man with a map and a list of references. At each of the reference points a man was "planted" to be interviewed. The pairs were let loose at 10 minute intervals for the long trail.

Mar. 11th - Signalling Section underwent Classification test, in Admirals Park. I passed 1st Class with a total of 99 marks.

Mar. 12th - Battalion out all night on a trenching expedition.

Mar 13th-28th - Severe training.

The British Army leadership were determined to whip the men into a disciplined, professional fighting force before they left for France.

Alec was a natural-born leader. He had been a valorous captain of his football teams, played the lead roles in his musical endeavours, and now desired to gain a commission as an officer in the British Army. The Gloucestershire Echo 22nd March 1915 recorded:

Gloucester Education Committee:

Rate Increased by a Penny- The monthly meeting of the Education Committee of the City Council was held at the Guildhall on Monday morning under the chairmanship of the Deputy-Mayor (Councillor Waddy)...At a meeting of the School Management Sub-Committee, a letter was read from Lance-Corpl. A.H.T. Lewis, who had enlisted in the Fifth Gloucesters, stating that he was desirous of applying for a commission, and asking whether the committee could see their way to give him additional financial assistance.

It was resolved that a reply be sent stating that the committee regretted they were unable to assist to any further extent than they were empowered to do.

Officers were required to purchase much of their own equipment, such as a tailored uniform, revolver, binoculars and mess kit. Alec had applied to the Gloucester Education Committee, in order that they may provide a donation to this effect. His request was unsuccessful, and Alec remained an unpaid Lance-Corporal. The Cheltenham Chronicle 27th March 1915 published the same notice:

Gloucester Education Committee:

Rate Increased by a Penny- The monthly meeting of the Education Committee of the City Council was held at the Guildhall on Monday morning under the chairmanship of the Deputy-Mayor (Councillor Waddy)...At a meeting of the School Management Sub-Committee, a letter was read from Lance-Corpl. A.H.T. Lewis, who had enlisted in the Fifth Gloucesters, stating that he was desirous of applying for a commission, and asking whether the committee could see their way to give him additional financial assistance.

It was resolved that a reply be sent stating that the committee regretted they were unable to assist to any further extent than they were empowered to do.

On the 29th March 1915, the 1/5th Gloucesters formed up at Chemsford under the command of Lt. Col. J.H. Collett, to leave their depot for France, with a strength of 28 officers and 916 men. They were reported off the town's railway station at 5:30 pm, and arrived in Folkestone at 9 pm, where they boarded RMS Invicta to cross the channel under the moon. The Invicta was built by William Denny & Brothers Dumbarton, in Yard No. 752. She was launched on Wednesday the 19th April 1905, and was propelled by 3×800nhp, triple-screw, Parson's Turbines with a maximum speed of 22 knots. Originally built as a passenger vessel, she was repurposed as a troop ship, with a length of 311.2 feet and a breadth of 40.1 feet. She was owned by the South Eastern & Chatham Railway Co., London at the time, and scrapped in April 1933. The Gloucesters arrived in Boulogne at 11:10 pm, and marched through several miles of the town to reach their bivouacs. A fierce north wind proved a hindrance to the men's sleep. On the 31st March 1915, the men moved by rail to Cassel, and from here to Steenvoorde where they were billeted in lofts and barns.

As Wood recorded in his dairy:

Mar. 29th - The Battalion, under the command of Lt-Col. J.H. Collett, left Chelmsford at 5.30 pm for the Front. A fair number of inhabitants congregated at the station, but not a cheer escaped their throats. However, we were all merry and bright. Arrived at Folkestone 9 pm. Embarked in RMS 'Invicta' for France. The passage over the Channel was delightful in brilliant moonlight. Our boat was

accompanied by a destroyer part of the way, and an exchange of lamp signals took place between the two vessels which we were eager to read. Approaching Boulogne harbour, one saw dozens of varied-coloured lamps hung aloft round the shore. The utter silence of the town seemed almost uncanny. We landed at 11 pm. As I stalked on the quayside I ran up against an RAMC fellow who passed a consoling remark to the effect that I should be fed up with France within 24 hours. Long monotonous march with full pack through Boulogne, over endless cobble stones. The Battalion bivouacked in French tents. Sleep was impossible owing to the bitter north wind that was blowing 'half a gale', penetrating the tent, blanket and backbone.

Mar. 30th - Battalion marched to station nearby and entrained in cattle trucks (32 in a truck). Detrained at Cassel and marched to Steenvoorde (Belgium). We were all very fatigued. Billeted in lofts and barns.

On the 7th April 1915, the Battalion as part of the 145th Brigade, moved to Ploegsteert to receive instructions on trench warfare; the men were billeted in the Brewery there. In the evening of the 8th April, the Battalion moved into the trenches for the first time, and at 10 am on the following day, Sergt. Lloyd became its first casualty having been wounded by sniper fire. On the 12th April, the whole brigade marched to billets between Bailleul and Steenwerck. On the 15th April, the Brigade returned to the frontline trenches at Ploegsteert Wood, or "Plug Street" as Alec would have referred to it as. Here, the 1/5th Gloucesters were attached to the 11th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division. Here, the Gloucesters moved into the frontline trenches at night, and received instruction in trench warfare by the London Rifle Brigade which were manning the posts. The Battalion came under fire from German machines guns which would periodically pour bursts into the wood, and flares which would be followed by rapid rifle fire designed to pin down the British soldiers.

Apr. 1st - More or less a day of rest for everyone except the Signallers, who were temporarily pressed into the service of the Colonel and Adjutant, dashing hither and thither with 'chits' containing orders to Company Commanders.

Apr. 2nd - The Battalion was inspected by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. On reaching the spot where the Signal Section stood, he enquired of Sergt. Jennings as to our speed on the 'buzzer', and the reply he received evidently pleased him.

Apr. 4th - After dinner, Battalion marched to Meteren, a matter of 7 miles, and were again billeted in lofts and barns.

Apr. 5th - Situation very quiet. Cigarettes (Studio Brand) issued for the first time. One could hear the guns pounding away very faintly in the distance.

Apr. 6th - I was on telephone duty at Transport HQ all night.

Apr. 7th - The Battalion marched away to Ploegsteert. HQ details were billeted in Brewery premises on the fringe of the wood. The top floor (reached by ladder) was the resting place of the Signal Section.

Apr. 8th - Lovely day. Fellows stood about the yard in groups listening to German shells whistling over, and observed them bursting in a field just over the main road. Great excitement reigned.

Apr. 9th - 48th (Territorial) Division relieved the 4th (Regular) Division. At dusk, Wally Deavin and I were detailed to proceed into the Front line as Signallers attached to 'D' Company. On reaching Somerset House, the Battalion's HQ in the wood, we were saddled with a 'Buzzer' and some food (not forgetting a supply of candles). From this point we were guided by a Somerset Light Infantryman by devious ways over a fearful track of broken branches. As we trundled along, German Very Lights frequently streamed up into the inky night, flooding the entire wood with their brilliance. The ascension of the enemy Very Light was the signal for an abrupt halt, when one had to stand perfectly still and represent a tree stump. Fritz, on the other hand, swept the wood from end to end with machine-gun and rifle fire. The whiz and plonk of the bullets into the trees, the presence here and

there of little cemeteries, and a peculiar nauseating odour which filled the air, all tended to impress one with a very weird sensation. Having now reached the other side of this vast assembly of trees, we were guided across open fields to the Front line at the mercy of enemy 'lead.' About half way across, Fritz opened a rapid burst of MG fire right in our path, and we instinctively fell earthwards, in a panic, and missed the bullets. I was thoroughly glad when we eventually reached our Signal dug-out. The Somerset Regulars were very cheery, happy-go-lucky fellows, and imparted some good advice, i.e. not to loiter about on the parapet at night, or expose the cranium too much by day.

Apr. 10th - Had a good look round the trenches and made acquaintances with many "Old Bills," "Alfs" and "Erbs." Sniped over the parapet at Fritz's loopholes. At dusk, came out of the line and rejoined the Battalion in Ploegsteert.

Apr. 11th - On signal duty at Somerset House.

Apr. 12th - The battalion moved away from Ploegsteert early in the morning and marched 8 miles to Steenwerck, a scattered agricultural village. Signal Section deposited in barn.

Apr. 13th - I was on telephone duty at "A" Company HQ.

Apr. 14th - I, in company with a few other Signallers, discovered a farmhouse where 'Pomme de Terre Fritz' could be obtained piping hot and lovely coffee. The good lady, Lucile Farddy, made us very welcome.

Apr. 15th - Left Steenwerck for Ploegsteert. Another weary jaunt through the wood. The Battalion took over the line from the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Wally Deavin and I took over signal duties in a squalid little dug-out in the Right Sector. Only a piece of corrugated iron covered the roof. I found it very difficult to keep awake during my 6 hour shift on the 'phone. About midnight the telephone wire broke. Off I wandered on my own to find the break across those unpleasant fields. Met Sergt. Jennings, who had followed the wire from the other end. The break was mended and I returned. The roar of artillery and the crackle of rapid fire away on our left proclaimed the Battle of Hill 60 in progress.

Apr. 18th - Fritz not very busy. I was foolishly gazing at his wire entanglements over the parapet, when a bullet whizzed by my ear and plonked into the paradoss behind. I decided to curb my curiosity in future.

On the 19th April 1915, the Battalion lost its first man; Lt. Barnett being shot and killed by a sniper. Wood recorded the incident, having himself almost been a casualty previously:

Apr. 19th - German artillery straffed the Oxford and Bucks on our right with "Little Willies" and "Coalboxes." Lieut. Barnett killed by a sniper whilst observing enemy lines through telescope at 5 o'clock in afternoon, being the first in the Battalion to make the supreme sacrifice. Relieved by the Bucks Battalion. Hurried scamper through the wood. Marched to Romarin (3 miles distant), in Reserve. I was detailed to lay a cable from HQ across country to "A" Company's farm. There, a phone was fixed up, and, dead tired, I nestled down to sleep alongside my partner, Jimmy Tuck.

That night, the Battalion was relieved by the Buckinghamshire Regiment and having marched to their billets at Romarin, where the battalion was placed in reserve.

Wood recalls the several days that followed:

Apr. 20th - Glorious weather.

Apr. 23rd - The Battalion marched to Nieppe for baths. The 'baths' were in a large brewery. It was a very funny sight to watch clusters of men bathing in the numerous ex-beer vats. About 20 men were allotted to each vat, half filled with water, to which was added a solitary lump of soap. The Battalion at sundown returned to Ploegsteert and took over the line.

Apr. 24th - Confined to dug-out. Fritz is very quiet.

Apr. 25th - Whilst calmly observing one of our aeroplanes, a bullet sped past my head with a swish.

Apr. 26th - German artillery shelled the Chateau at St. Yves, just behind the line.

It was at this time, that the first issue of the *Fifth Gloucester Gazette* was published and distributed to the men. This was a compilation of anecdotes, poems, promotions, excerpts from newspaper articles and quizzes designed to lift morale within the men. Published bi-monthly, it was composed of contribution by the officers and men of the 5th Gloucesters, and was the first trench newspaper in the British Army.

After their short respite at Nieppe, the men were ordered back into the frontline at Ploegsteert where they were relieved on the 27th April 1915.

Wood's diary mentions this, and a humorous event about a mock battle between signallers and military police:

Apr. 27th - The Battalion relieved and marched to Romarin.

Apr. 29th - In the evening a spirited bombardment took place in the barn between the police and signallers, whose sleeping quarters were separated by 2 low barriers. The ammunition was as follows - Army biscuits with stale jam, 'clods' of plaster from the wall and spare kit.

On the 1st May they were back in the line for four days, and the process repeated.

Wood recalled the intensity of action increasing in the sector:

May 1st - Re-entered the trenches. 'Palf' Wally and I detailed for duty in Right Sector. We cooked our meals on a coke brazier out in the trench. Everybody was issued with a gas respirator - a mere was of cotton wool with tapes attached.

May 2nd - Fritz got very energetic with rifle, machine and artillery fire.

May 4th - 3.30 am. Owing to telephone line being broken had to make a frantic dash to Battalion HQ in the wood with a message. It was almost light when I was making my way back to the trench, and as I scampered over the wretched field in full view of Fritz, the latter turned a machine gun on me, but luckily the 'lead' was a little high.

May 5th - The Battalion wended its way back to Romarin.

Gas having been used by the German Army a year previously, the British Small Box Respirator was issued to the Gloucesters, and improvement of the ineffective "Hypo" gas veil. The Small Box Respirator became the standard issue gas masks for British men on the Somme.

As grenades were in short supply, Lt. Guise of the 1/5th Gloucesters began improvising bombs from jam tins and gun cotton as was adopted on the Gallipoli Peninsular. On the 6th May 1915, one such bomb exploded accidentally whilst Lt. Guise was demonstrating them to a class killing him and several of the men.

Wood wrote:

May 6th - Lieut. Guise, in the afternoon, was explaining the working of a jam tin bomb to a party of his men stood around him in a field near the billet, when, by some means or other, the bomb exploded and instantly killed the Lieutenant and one or two men. The remainder of the party was either blinded or otherwise wounded. It was a moving scene when the guard turned out and presented arms as the stretcher-bearers carried Lieut. Guise's body past their post.

The Gloucester Journal 8th May 1915 provided an excellent series of accounts from the men of the 1/5th Gloucesters including Alec himself:

Local Territorials at the Front:

The 5th Gloucesters:

"Extremely Dangerous Work"- Pte E. Watts, D company, 1/5th Gloucesters, son of Mr and Mrs Frank Watts, 11, Dean's Walk, Gloucester, writing on Monday, May 3rd, says: "I am glad to say I am in the pink of condition: in fact I have never felt so well in all my life. Of course we are roughing it a good deal. The weather is splendid, the sun being very powerful at times, and we are all sunburnt. Our Company are in the reserve trenches, the remaining three Companies of the Battalion are up in the firing line. Our work for this spell is to hold the reserve trenches in case of attack, and to keep our comrades in the firing line supplied with food, water, and all supplies in general. This is extremely dangerous work, and in carrying it out we are often subjected to a hail of lead from the enemy. Of course down on the ground we drop, and I can assure you there's no chance to pick out the dry spots like we did when undergoing our training at Chelmsford. No, it's a case of drop where you are now-water or no water, mud or no mud. Last night I happened to be detailed for guard, and was posted as sentry on the main road to the trench- about 300 yards in the rear. One would think the Germans were annoyed over something last night, for they opened rapid fire again and again on our trenches, and a good many bullets, being high, came sailing over the tops of the trenches into the wall of the ruined cottage where I was concealed. This made it most unpleasant I can assure you. Our "quarters" are in the cellar of an old ruined chateau. It's a fearful little hole; there are 12 of us in here, in addition to other occupants- those who have a hatred for Keating's powder. Last night whilst we were trying to obtain a few hours' sleep, 3 or 4 bullets struck the building overhead and sent down a shower of small bricks and dust, which happened to drop on one of the chaps sleeping at the bottom of the stairs, waking him up with the remark, "Who's dubbing bricks," and it was not until this morning that he knew it was through a bullet striking the wall. We surprise ourselves in the utter cool way in which we take things. Last night there were again sounds of a big artillery duel taking place on our left where we are now was once a pretty village, but now alas! It's like a big brick-builder's yard. We had a pleasant surprise the other day, being issued with two packets of cigarettes and one packet of tobacco from the Co-operative Society, Gloucester, but the pleasant feature of it was that upon the outside of the packets of tobacco was a photograph of our old Cathedral at home. You cannot realise how delighted our fellows were. Well I'm glad to say all our fellows are in fine spirits. I heard one chap ask another the other night, "If he was coming down Hemptsted to get a bit of cricket practice in." But we are playing a bigger game of cricket now...We had an open-air service last Thursday, conducted by the Bishop of Pretoria, who gave an excellent address. You will be interested to know that our Battalion has been highly complimented for some fine trench digging under fire."

"If The Boys At Home Could Only See":

Pte R.E. Bartlett, 1/5th Gloucesters, in recent letters to his father, Mr Ashton Bartlett, Barton-street, Gloucester, from "Somewhere in Belgium," says:-

"I saw an account of the taking of Hill 60 in the "Citizen". By jove they did make a row. It was an incessant banging all night. Started at 6:30 in the evening and did not finish until the next morning. From where we were we could hear the noise and see the flashes in the sky. We are only a few yards from the enemy's trenches, and in between lie dead horses and cows. In the trenches, where we first went in for instructions. Between the lines lay the bodies of two dead Scottish, who had been out there a month or more, but it has been impossible to bury them, as it is so risky, but we were told

that a brother Scot of another clan crawled out one night and got their paybooks and identification discs. To see the country just where the trenches are would break your heart almost. As I was on sentry last night, I had to stand outside a ruined building with a roadway running past, just for all the world like at home, and I started thinking and imagined I could see the place all peaceful. Then I suddenly came out of my reverie and saw what the Germans had caused to be done. Across the road and right over the fields was a trench. The house was a mass of ruins; behind me was another practically burnt to the ground, with only three walls standing, and inside were a couple of bedsteads and two bicycles all bent and twisted from the heat of the flames, and I thought then: If only the boys at home who haven't joined could only see how poor Belgium has been served out, they would storm the recruiting office in thousands, but as it is they would rather stand and face the scorn of the populace than come out and do their little bit. From where I am sitting now I can count 12 ruined farmsteads. Last night when we went into the trenches we were greeted by the Germans with "Are you Bucks?" Of course we didn't answer. In about ten minutes they shouted "Hullo, 5th Gloucesters!" How the dickens they know is more than I can tell and it only goes to show how their spy system works amongst us all the time.

In another letter received the same time and written after leaving the trenches, Pte Bartlett days: To-day has been full of incidents. We slept in billets (Tuesday night), in huts to hold 20 just behind the lines. I said slept, but as a matter of fact we were relieved at the trenches, took out things to the huts, and then back again with picks and shovels, filling sand bags until 1 a.m. Wednesday morning, back to huts, stand to at 2:45, then to bed until 9 a.m. Moved off at dinner time to another place, where we had a bath and change of underclothes, uniforms fumigated, and then back to the old billet where we were before entering the trenches. We were not in the Hill 60 affair, but we were very near it, just fancy the devils using those gas bombs. They are the Prussians in that part, and are very bitter against the English, but I fancy just where we were the Saxons were in, and they aren't so bad. The fellows of the Regiment we relieved told us they had a fine brass band going. Most of the other Battalions in our Brigade have caught it worse than us, simply because they keep firing at the enemy to annoy them, and they ask for all they get. We very rarely fire except when they put a sniper on to us. Then we lie in wait and put the bounder out of his misery. Some of our fellows told me that in their part of the trenches the Germans had a white flag stuck up for a long time, presumable meaning "Don't fire to-day." So you see they don't want to kill, neither do we, and we are only there to hold the line. Of course, these are the Saxons, but I have heard that when the Prussians come in, they are at it hammer and tongs all day. Very sorry to hear of poor Collins. I went to school with him.

Pluck Of The Listening Patrol:

Private Don Hart, Signalling Section, 1st/5th Gloucesters, son of Mr and Mrs Hart, The Boundary, Sandhurst-road, Gloucester, writes under date April 30th that he has no complaints at all- "the life certainly suits me all right. I have been on Headquarters both trips up, but I think I shall take a turn in the trenches this time; it's quite safe if you look after yourself, and not run any unnecessary risks such as poking your head above the trench to have a look at things for curiosity's sake. That's where most of the casualties occur...The boys who have got the pluck are those who form the listening patrol. They creep out at night at different points along the line and get as near as they can to the German line, and try and find out what they are doing- very risky work. Our Battalion has had special praise from the General Commanding the Brigade with regard to our patrols. Wish I could give you some idea when this will all come to an end. It's a problem that will not be solved for a time. Everybody holds their own opinion about it; some days from the different accounts that we hear we think that it will be over in a month or so. Most of the Regulars that I have come across are of the opinion that it will not last over September, but I myself have my doubts. Anyway, we must 'wait and

see', hoping for the best. If we have to stay in this position we shall be all right. We should take some moving I can assure you. Trust the Gloucester boys to hold their own with the Germans. They have made a good impression so far."

"Wounded Arm Going On Grandly"

Pte Chas. Phillips D, Co., 1/5th Gloucesters, writes us from No. 12 Ward, No. 6 General Hospital, France, that his wounded arm is going on grandly, and in about two weeks he will be himself again and able to have another "splash off" at the beauties. Describing his first experiences in the trenches, Pte Phillips remarks the 24 hours passed by quietly. The only mishap we had was that our platoon officer fell in a "Jack Johnson" hole, full of water. "As you might guess, when the news became known it caused a bit of fun." The writer, referring to the Rugby football match played during their rest from trench work, says Gloucester was well represented on the winning side. The back division was composed of C. Cook (Gloucester); F. Webb (Gloucester), R. Poulton-Palmer (Harlequins), L. Hamblin and W. Washbourne (Gloucester); and A. Lewis and Sysum (Gloucester), S. Smart, S. Millard, J. Harris, and A. Cook (Gloucester) figured amongst the forwards, also Lieut. Summer. The five tries were scored by Harris (2), Smart, Sysum and Washbourne.

Loss Of An Eye:

Mr George Goddard, of 72, Barton-street, Gloucester, whose son Lindsey was wounded whilst serving at the front with the 1/5th Gloucesters, has received a letter from Lieut. R. Graham Brown, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, ophthalmic specialist at a general hospital in France, stating that the patient is progressing very satisfactorily. The wound so injured his left eye that it was found necessary to remove it, but the right eye escaped uninjured. It was necessary to operate upon his skull in order to remove a piece of skull in order to remove a piece of shell. On April 20th he was able to sit up in an armchair for an hour or so. The lieutenant added that he was hoping to end Lindsey Goddard to England in a week or two. Meanwhile he is in very good spirits, and has all the comforts possible. Writing home, Lindsey Goddard stated that he was "going on fine," and that he was very comfortable, and expected soon to be in England.

Thanks For Cigarettes And Papers:

Lce.-Corpl. Alec Lewis acknowledging with many thanks a parcel of cigarettes and papers sent out for distribution amongst the Gloucester footballers in the 1/5th, says the cigarettes were much appreciated and the papers, too, especially "Punch." They were eagerly read, and you may depend upon it they will go the round well. At present there is much of a sameness about the life both in the trenches and out of them. Five aeroplanes are supposed to have been brought down by our fellows. I saw two myself yesterday. The weather here holds up wonderfully- as hot as midsummer to-day. Cardigans, vests, etc., are being discarded everywhere. We are all sorry about Car Cummins."

Getting Used To Being Sniped:

Pte W.J. Wood, Signalling Section 1/5th Gloucesters, writing to Mr E.T. Gardom, Clerk of the Peace, Shire Hall, from "The Beehive, Threadneedle-street The Trenches," says: We are in a rest camp for a few days after our arduous work in the trenches. Although in a "rest" camp we are not exempt from work, and have to attend to the telegraph and telephone instruments at the various Company headquarters. When in the trenches it is at night that we are busiest, and it is no easy matter to keep awake when one only gets about five hours' sleep in 24. The German trenches are only about 70 yards away from ours in some places, and one can hear them singing, playing mouthorgans, and

enjoying themselves. It is sometimes the sign that they are going to be relieved by another lot. For instance, the other night the Germans (the Saxons) were having quite a serenade, and our fellows started firing at them pretty briskly. They shouted back "Don't shoot at us; we are not shooting at you, save your bullets for the Prussians, we are jolly well fed up. What have you got for supper?" "Five rounds rapid," our fellows promptly replied, and proceeded to pepper them as before. No further comment was heard from "Fritz" that night. I don't mind so much the trenches, but it is coming out going in that I don't relish. The Germans know when our trenches are being relieved, and they sweep the rear with Maxim gun fire. Their rifles are sighted on the different corduroy paths leading into the wood and clamped, and as soon as they hear the slightest sound or see anything suspicious with the aid of their powerful star shells, it only means pulling the trigger. The Germans have got a Maxim gun trained on a pump where our fatigue party draw water, and if our fellows are careless and let the water jars kink together, a shower of lead is very soon on its way. I am getting used to being sniped at by the infamous sniper, and I look forward to the time when the snipers will be dislodged from their hiding places and made to face us in the open. The majority of snipers' loopholes are well protected by small steel doors, which are closed to and fro at his will. As a battalion, we have the death of one of our best officers to avenge as yet. It was in the same trench at the time it happened, and I believe it taught us to take everything more seriously, and not to take undue risks. "Fritz" was very quiet last Sunday, and the birds even took leave to sing in the trees overlooking our trench. The weather has been a treat the last week- the temperature equal to August...I have not fired much to speak of in the trenches. One day I happened to be looking at the German lines through a periscope, and saw a hole in a ruined building which was being used by a sniper. I took aim and sent five shots over to the brute, and I had about 15 in reply. I am glad to see in the paper that Gloucestershire was the second highest in England for recruiting. News of any interest reaches us very quickly. The result of the Cup final was known the same day within ten hours of its being played.

"The Sooner The Better":

One of the 1/5th Gloucesters- a married man with three children- writes to his wife as follows:- How are the 3rd Batt. For the 5ths going on? Are they at full strength yet? Tell any young men you happen to meet that we shall want them. It is up to them if we are to win- and I believe the Germans will take some beating. It is too early to call for peace, yet, so much as I am longing for it, there's no sign of it here. And I know there are lots of young men at home who have not joined yet that are more able than a married man like myself. I should like to have a go at some of them at home, and sincerely hope there will be some means of making them join. The sooner the better.

The newspaper accounts are somewhat optimistic of the conditions in the trenches, although winter had not yet stung the men and the weather was quite warm. Pte. Wood's narrative emphasised the closeness of the British and German lines. So much so that musical instruments could be heard from the German side, which humanised the enemy to the British. Further, it was revealed that the 1/5th Gloucester's section of line was opposed by Saxons who were not as concerned with assaulting the British, than their Prussian counterparts further down the line. Alec would have bore witness to the British assault at Hill 60 on the 17th-22nd April where huge mines were blown creating a terrific noise. He would have also seen the German gas attacks from the 1st-5th May when the Germans retook the hill. In his paragraph, Alec mentions the use of aeroplanes. These were used in the Hill 60 attack to identify German positions by "flash-spotting", and report back to artillery, in order that they may provide suppressing fire. The British aeroplanes flew unopposed and were effective as forward observers for the Royal Artillery.

Wood recorded:

May 7th - Ploegsteert shelled very heavily. Many civilians killed.

May 9th - Open-air church service at "A" Company's farm.

On the 10th May 1915, the Gloucesters watched an intense German artillery bombardment of the town of Ploegsteert, which killed several civilians and badly damaged many buildings in the town.

Wood's diary recorded the following:

May 10th - Returned to the trenches. Along the Romarin road we passed a large number of civilians in the fields just outside Ploegsteert, where they had taken refuge while the Germans shelled the town. The women with their knitting baskets presented a pitiable sight as they gazed towards their homes which were gradually being razed to the ground.

The Great War and its collateral effects on civilians, was very much tangible in the eyes of Alec and his men of the 1/5th Gloucesters. They could see first-hand the death and destruction that inaccurate German shelling was capable of wreaking on homes and families much like their own.

Wood recounted the next fortnight, which was relatively relaxing for him and the battalion signallers:

May 15th - Back to sunny Romarin. "Palf" and I detailed for signal duty at "A" Company's farm.

May 19th - Returned to Ploegsteert trenches.

May 20th - Sergt. Hearle killed by a sniper. Wilfred Sleeman shot dead by a sniper while watching the effect of a bullet he had just fired. Attended the burial in the Battalion Cemetery in the wood.

May 22nd - Battalion trailed back to Romarin.

May 23rd - The Battalion (in small batches) made a further excursion into Nieppe for the purpose of cleansing the "frame." A few Signallers (including myself) deployed after the alleged bath and wandered off down the bank of the River Lys. On our return we adjourned to the corner Estaminet and ate large quantities of egg omelette to the accompaniment of Belgian beer.

May 24th - Whit. Powell, Palf, Wally Deavin, and I journeyed into Nieppe on a "joy ride." Lovely weather. Visited Armentieres to see the result of the bombardment.

May 26th - Marched back to the trenches and the dugout life.

On the 27th May 1915, Alec was promoted to paid Lance-Corporal.

Alec would have seen a huge mine explode under the German lines on the Gloucester's right flank, as the Royal Engineers Tunnelling Corps sapped the trenches there. The earth lifted 200 feet in the air, and as German machine gun crews attempted to hold the resulting crater, the Gloucesters and the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry poured fire onto the advancing Germans to check their progress. In the lull that followed, it was discovered that the German Engineers had dug a bombing sap underneath the Gloucester lines. It was only by a matter of hours that the British had out-dug the Germans; the casualties for the Gloucesters would have been horrific otherwise.

Wood's diary for the period:

June 5th - "Plugstreet" again, through the wood where bullets came zipping from all sides. Out of the wood and a mad scamper over the 2 open fields and into the front trench, bathed in sweat.

June 6th - At 10.23 am our Engineers blew up a mine under the enemy's front line opposite the Sector occupied by the Oxford and Bucks on our right. At the moment of the explosion, the trench in which we stood swayed very slightly backward and forward, a dull thud was heard, and the German trench

and its occupants were blown into the air some 200 feet. The huge black mass seemed to suspend itself for a second or so, and then spread out to twice the size as it fell to earth. The effect was very weird. The Warwick artillery immediately shelled the crater with salvos of high explosive shells. Sergt. Morris and his merry machine-gunners took up commanding positions and peppered hot and strong, while rapid fire rang all up the line. Despite the heavy fire the enemy manned the crater time and again with machine gunners, who no doubt made the most of their job while they lived. One observed the mangled bodies of German infantry and engineers hanging on our barbed wire. Apparently the Germans had tunnelled over to our trench and were about to lay a mine, but luckily, our engineers won the race.

June 8th - Back in peaceful Romarin.

On the 11th June 1915, the Gloucesters were deployed to the left of Ploegsteert 1,200 yards south west of Messines. The position was overlooked by the German trenches on Messines Ridge, and was known as "Stink Farm". This name came from the decomposing bodies of a whole battalion of the London Scottish Regiment which had lain unburied since a failed attack on Messines Ridge on the 31st October 1914.

Wood wrote:

June 11th - The Battalion took over the trenches away on the left of Ploegsteert from the Warwick Regiment. These trenches lay opposite Messines. Situated as they were at the bottom of the ridge, the Hun had an excellent view in the daytime and it was not safe to walk about except by night. A much-battered London bus was parked in No Man's Land. Its last occupants were, I believe, of the London Scottish, whose attack on Messines proved disastrous. The entrance to my dugout was so small that I had to crawl in. It was fearfully damp, and rats were in abundance. The Signal Cabin had a much higher roof, thank goodness.

Wood's diary mentions a London bus on the battlefield. This was not unusual, as before the war, the British government has sponsored the bus company on the condition that in the event of a war, the busses could be requisitioned and used for military service.

On the 14th June 1915, the 1/5th Gloucesters received a consignment of soldiers as part of Kitchener's New Army; ironically it were the Territorials, once derided by regular troops, which indoctrinated this new wave of recruits. Alec and his Territorial comrades had proven themselves as able troops.

As Wood recorded, there was an attack by the fresh troops on the 15th June 1915 which brought about intense German shelling in return:

*June 14th - The first consignment of Kitchener's Army attached to the Battalion for trench instruction.
June 15th - The New Army decided to try their rifles and start a small offensive of their own. Naturally Fritz was wrathful and proceeded to shell our trenches very heavily as a reprisal, with the result 2 fellows of Kitchener's Army and 1 member of our Battalion were killed. After this we wormed our way back after relief, via a new communication trench, up to the White House, where we struck the road. A few miles march brought us to the Court Dreve Farm - near Neuve Eglise. Here the Battalion was billeted in the numerous barns, lofts, chicken runs, etc.*

On the 17th June the Gloucesters marched back to their billets in the villages behind the line; it was noted that some of the farmers made them feel particularly unwelcome upon their return as often the soldiers would supplement their rations with eggs and chickens appropriate from local farms.

On the 19th June 1915, the battalion marched to Nieppe as Wood narrated:

June 17th - The Signallers organised a game of rounders and opposed the Machine Gun Section in a field opposite the billet.

June 18th - Our slumbers were disturbed rudely by hoardes of mice as they sped over our faces.

June 19th - Marched away from mouse-ridden Court Dreve Farm to Nieppe. The Signal Section was billeted in a large chateau. The gardens were a perfect paradise of roses in full bloom.

June 21st - Whit, Powell, Palf and I wandered into Armentieres and visited the Cathedral. The roof in many places was perforated by shell holes.

June 23rd - Practically the whole Battalion attended a concert given in the grounds of the chateau by the "Follies."

Alec and the 1/5th Gloucesters then marched through Bailleul on the 24th June 1915. As Wood's diary reveals:

June 24th - In the evening we packed up and marched to Bailleul.

In Bailleul, Alec and his men witnessed Canadian soldiers suffering the horrific wounds of a gas attack. Wood wrote:

June 25th - Snatched a few hours' sleep in the early morning, got up, had the customary snack for breakfast, and wandered into the town sightseeing. Outside the Casualty Clearing Station one beheld several long rows of stretchers on which lay the victims of the first poisonous gas attack by the Germans. They were all Canadians, and had taken part in the Battle of Hill 60.

The effects of gas in the operations around Hill 60, were deadly and lifelong. Chlorine, Phosphine and Diphosphine were the gasses used by the German Army until the advent of Mustard Gas in 1917. These earlier gasses were released from canisters spread along the frontline, and relied on the wind to carry the fumes over to the opposing trenches. The gasses degraded lungs, melted facial tissue and asphyxiated anyone without a gas mask.

At the church of Saint Martin in Bailleul, the men were thrown a concert by the St. George's Chapel Choir accompanied by an organ. Several months earlier, a German machine gunner was positioned in the bell tower of the church, and had killed several advancing British soldiers before surrendering. In frustration, the British men bayoneted the doors to the church; these marks would have been seen by Alec and his comrades. By the end of the war, 98% of Bailleul's infrastructure was destroyed by British and French shelling, and the church was completely destroyed save for the guardroom at its base.

Wood recalls the signallers' drunken behaviour in the town, as well as the 1/5th Gloucesters' movement to Bergin and then on to Godenham:

June 26th - The Signallers managed to find a cafe where English beer was on tap. Others had smelt it first, judging by the enormous number already in the bar. Tubby Rayner, of the MG Section, was giving vent to a song as we entered. However, the Battalion fell in at 10 pm for the march to Vieux Bergin. The Signallers, who were "dizzy" were wrangled into the centre of the column, linked arms with those on either side, and thereby managed to effect a more or less dignified progress. Whit dropped his rifle on the cobble stones, and hearing the clatter of the fallen musket, the Provost

Sergeant, Peter Huggins, hastened to the spot, and peered into the dark files of men to find the culprit, but without success.

June 27th - Battalion moved away from Vieux Bergin by night and marched to Godenham. We were extremely weary. The guide for HQ details escorted us in a wide circle before finding the barn where we were billeted.

On the 28th June 1915, the 1/5th Gloucesters had moved to Alouagne, from where they marched to Noueux les Mines on the 12th July 1915 in preparation for the battle of Loos. Luckily for Alec, his division was not selected to take part in the horrific attack that saw 59,247 British casualties. Instead, the 1/5th Gloucesters travelled by march and train to Bayencourt which they reached on the 19th July 1915.

Wood recounted the period:

June 28th - Marched to Alouagne. The Signal Section was deposited in a huge barn adjoining a chateau.

June 30th - Flag-wagging on the neighbouring heights.

July 2nd - The long spells of fierce sunlight enabled us to use heliographs at long distances with excellent results.

July 4th - Church parade in a field.

July 5th - Palf and I went for a long walk.

July 6th - After parade about a dozen Signallers formed a 'Comb Band.' Under the baton of Sergt. Jennings, the comb band gave a creditable performance to the delight of the signallers gathered.

July 9th - Brigade field operations.

July 12th - The Battalion marched away from Alouagne by night to Noeux Led Mines, in order to take up reserve position for the Battle of Loos. On arrival the Battalion bivouacked in open fields. A fearful thunderstorm broke over the vicinity of our camping ground.

July 16th - At 9 pm "Fall in" blew, and the Battalion started its memorable march to Ames, approximately 21 miles distant. The drizzling rain made the going very hard. At about 4 am the Battalion topped a ridge and saw its destination, the spire of Ames Church, in the early morning sunlight.

July 17th - Rested.

July 18th - Left Ames, 7 am. Marched to Bergette where the Battalion entrained for Doullens in closed goods wagons. Detrained and marched to Sarton.

July 19th - Ambled on to Bayencourt. The sun was terrifically hot.

Bayencourt is a small village located in the extreme north west of France near the border with Belgium. From here, they relieved the 1/93rd Regiment of the French Army in the frontline at Hebuterne, 15 km's north of Albert. Unlike the sandbagged barricades of Ploegsteert, the trenches of Hebuterne were 6 feet deep along the line. Here, the 5th Gloucesters alternated manning the trenches with the 1st Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 100 to 300 yards east of Hebuterne. The German lines were between 300 to 1000 yards distant, a change from Ploegsteert, where the trenches were 100 yards apart.

Wood narrated:

July 20th - At dusk the Battalion marched to Hebuterne and relieved the 1st Battalion, 93rd Regiment of the French Army in the Front Line trenches.

July 21st - One and all very busy making a general reconnaissance of the position of trenches, cables,

and Germans.

July 24th - Trailed back to Bayencourt in Reserve.

July 26th - Out at night signalling with electric lamps.

July 28th - Battalion left Bayencourt for Sailly-Au-Bois. At dusk tramped on into Hebuterne and took over trenches.

July 31st - As yet this part of the line at Hebuterne was very tranquil. Very little shelling.

On the 3rd August 1915, a patrol of the 1/5th Gloucesters charged a German patrol in no-mans-land, killing 3 and causing the rest to flee. Sgt. Knight and Sgt. Harvey were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for this action. Wood's diary gives an accurate account of August for the 1/5th Gloucesters:

Aug. 19th - At sunset, with Lce-Cpl. Birkenshaw, I was ambling towards the lower barricade, our arms loaded with rations - cheese, bread, currants, bully-beef, when Otto, the German machine-gunner, started his evening strafe. Zip, zip, zip, past head, shoulders and legs. Down we sprawled in the roadway, rations spreading in all directions. After Otto had finished we rose and enjoyed a long laugh.

Aug. 21st - Visited French lines on the left and a French officer took a photograph of Lee-Williams and myself alongside a few French soldats. Came out of the line at nightfall, and the Battalion marched to Sailly-au-Bois.

Aug. 23rd - Enjoyed a good concert given by the RAMC.

Aug. 24th - Gas helmets tested. In small batches, had to enter and linger for a few minutes in a small marquee filled with poison gas. Battalion paraded and was inspected by the Second in Command.

Aug. 25th - The Battalion relieved the Warwicks in their trenches for a short period. Fine weather prevailed.

Aug. 27th - I was transferred to 'B' Company's Signal Station. Food very scarce.

Aug. 29th - Rain pelting down all day.

In September, the 1/5th Gloucesters were manning the trenches on the right flank, and until December were relieved by the 6th Gloucesters every eight days. Wood's diary accounted for September:

Sept. 5th - The Battalion was relieved at Hebuterne and moved to Sailly-au-Bois.

Sept. 8th - The Battalion marched away to Bus-Les-Artois.

Sept. 13th-16th - Prior to a route march, the Battalion formed up in a field just outside the village, and Lt-Col. J.H. Collett presented the ribbon of the DCM to Sergt. R.E. Knight and Lce-Cpl. F.W. Harvey.

Sept. 17th - The Battalion marched to Hebuterne and relieved the Worcesters and Shropshire L.I.

Sept. 18th-28th - By this time Hebuterne was a "hot shop." The German artillery were ever active, likewise the MG, rifle and 'Minnie' experts opposite our trenches. Mails were very scarce, like rations. For several days our artillery bombarded the enemy lines and his wire. We were warned to be ready to attack at any moment and all preparations were made. Order received cancelling the attack. One of our patrols was surrounded by Germans near the enemy barbed wire. All but Lieut. H. Moore and Lce-Cpl. Rodway managed to get away. These 2 remained trapped and fought to the end. Daylight patrol went out to the spot next morning and reported that their dead bodies were lying near the Hun wire, and that there were at least 4 German corpses in the grass.

On the 28th September 1915, the 5th Gloucesters were ordered to stand by for an attack. The anticipation amongst Alec and the men of his battalion would have been palpable, as this would have been their first assault. Having seen the destruction at Stink Farm, Hill 60 and the casualties in

the clearing stations positioned in the towns that they had passed through, the Territorials must have been well aware that any one of them could suffer the same fate. The attack was cancelled to a mixture of relief and frustration. The following day, a patrol was involved in a brief skirmish with the enemy.

The battalion was relieved on the 29th September 1915, and withdrawn to Bus Les Artois for rest. Wood wrote:

Sept. 29th - Came out of the trenches and headed for Bus-les-Artois.

Sept. 30th - Capt. H.C. Bliar Sessions (Signal Officer) kept the Section busy each day. Several route marches via Louvencourt and Authie. Pretty country hereabouts.

It was around this time that Alec was trained as a grenadier. As The 5th Gloucester Gazette p. 19 addressed:

Battalion Grenadiers:

Roll of Qualified Grenadiers who have passed Tests at the Brigade Grenadier School...

C Company:-

2693 L/Corpl Lewis, A.H.T....

As was often the case, the cricketers and more dextrous men of the battalion, were selected as bombers for their throwing ability and hand-eye coordination. Alec was a keen cricketer and bowling was his forte; it seemed only natural that he was selected for the grenadier course. During this period the Gloucester Journal 16th October 1915 recounted a rugby match in which Alec took part:

Football in France:

Fifth Gloucesters' Enjoy Keen Game:

City Players Prominent:

A correspondent sends us the following, which will be read with great interest by Gloucester football enthusiasts: -

During a few days rest from the trenches the 1/5th Gloucesters have been indulging in some football. Several matches were arranged, the most attractive, perhaps, being the one between D and C Companies. The weather was splendid, and the match attracted quite a crowd of Tommies. A French gentleman kindly consented to kick-off. Both sides were exceptionally keen and play was very fast. The D Company backs, shining with some pretty passing, Pte. S. Sysum ran over with an easy try, Lance-Corpl. Washbourn followed with two more. During the second half Washbourn again crossed twice, both being the result of some fine passing. Towards the closing stages Lieut. A.C. Welsh scored. The game finished with D Company winners by 6 tries (18 points) to nil. Although D Company piled up points, C Company played a good game, and stuck it to the last, Lance-Corpl. Alec Lewis and F. Ayliffe shining. Pte. L. Hamblin and H. Pollard played splendidly in the centre for the winners. The game was greatly enjoyed by the players and spectators.

5th Gloucesters' Thanks:

Dear Sir- I think that many who have contributed towards sending the unit of five baths, and towards the steriliser for the 5th Gloucesters, will be glad to see the enclosed copy of a letter from Col. Collett:

1/5th Gloucester Regt.

October 2nd 1915.

Dear Miss Walrond, I am glad to say that the steriliser has arrived, and from the results obtained so far with it, it promises to be as great a boon as the baths. Every member of the Battalion is grateful to the Gloucester Women's Suffrage Society for its kindness. The R.A.M.C units organise baths, but these are usually in the villages some way rear of the lines. We take our baths with us when we go up into the trenches and they are actually in operation within half a mile of the German lines! Consequently the companies in support and reserve can get a bath. The baths are so organised that with an extra boiler (extricated from some ruin or another) we can do one Company per day. The baths are indeed a boon, and we are most grateful.

Yours sincerely,

J.H. Collett, Lieut.-Col.

Alec was again mentioned for his courage during the match. Interestingly, the extract also reveals that the battalion was sent a steriliser and baths from Gloucester. These were much needed comforts for the men, who must have been filthy from their time in the trenches. The respite was brief, and as always, the dangers of war loomed over the men's heads. As Wood detailed:

Oct. 6th - Capt. V.N. Johnson left the Battalion to take up an appointment as Brigade Major of the 12th Infantry Brigade. The 5th Glosters to a man were deeply sorry to lose him. Capt. Johnson unconsciously endeared himself to the Battalion as a model soldier and a constant gentleman.

Oct. 9th - Officers played the sergeants at football. Result, nil-nil. In the evening went to a concert given by the Motor Transport Troupe. About halfway through the programme, the alarm was sounded. Off we had to dash to the billet, pack up and parade immediately. The Battalion marched to a field fringed by a coppice, a quarter of a mile away, and there we stood for over an hour while the Colonel carried out a most minute inspection of every man and his luggage.

Between the 11th and 18th October 1915, the 1/5th Gloucesters manned the Hebuterne trenches, before returning back on the 26th October 1915 to witness the trench walls collapse under the weight of heavy rain. An infestation of body lice plagued the men, and their dugouts were filled with mud. To make matters worse, the coke refused to burn in their stoves, and the men were unable to burn off the lice. Wood recalled these weeks miserably:

Oct. 11th-18th - Returned to Hebuterne trenches. Took over the Signal Station in Bugead trench with Johnny Gwilliam and Palf to keep me company. The German shelling was certainly on the increase.

Oct. 19th - Wormed our way out of the trenches and plodded back to Bus-Les-Artois.

Oct. 20th-25th - Usual signalling parades under our popular leader, Capt. Blair Sessions.

Oct. 26th - The Battalion marched back to Hebuterne trenches. The weather had broken at last to our dismay. Very heavy rain fell. The sides of the trenches were beginning to collapse. Coke refused to burn, and to make matters worse the rain-water coursed its way down the walls of the dug-out and the floor was ankle-deep in liquid mud.

Oct. 27th-Nov. 3rd - The communication trenches in the front line were soon transformed into squishy squashy alleys. At night the going was even more tedious. It took half an hour to reach the Company Commander with an urgent message when he was on a tour of inspection in an area about 200 yards distant from the Signal Station. It all depended on the successful dragging out of one foot, embedded halfway to the knee, as to whether the next step would be taken in the desired direction. The floods rendered thousands of rats homeless, and so they infested the dug-outs.

On the 4th November 1915, the battalion was relieved, and was back in the line on the 12th November 1915. Wood wrote of bayonet drills that the men were put through in preparation for the bitter hand-to-hand nature of trench raids on the Western Front:

Nov. 4th - Out of the trenches and off back to Bus-Les-Artois.

Nov. 5th-11th - Battalion paraded in the usual field. The Battalion went for a route march.

Participated in some vigorous bayonet-fighting practices.

Nov. 12th - Off up the line. Arrived in shell-battered Hebuterne for another spell in the trenches.

This period of eight-day rotations continued, the respite being particularly important in the bitter cold of the winter months. Wood recalled how the weather alternated between wet and dry by the day, transforming the freezing, dry earth into a muddy river:

Nov. 13th-19th - Weather very much improved. Followed nights of glorious moonlight.

Nov. 20th - Relieved again, thank goodness, and plodded to Bus.

Nov. 22nd-28th - Signalling parades in the orchard outside the village.

Nov. 28th - Weather very dry and cold. Several degrees of frost. The Battalion tramped away to Hebuterne once again, and relieved the Bucks Battalion in the trenches.

Nov. 29th - It rained very heavily and the trenches were quickly transformed into liquid mud canals.

Nov. 30th-5th Dec. - Heavy rain continued to fall, and the trenches were in a hopeless state. One was obsessed with the idea of joining the Balloon Section or the Air Force. Waders issued. The issue of rum was increased. Watched the effects of our artillery bombardment of the German lines. The bursting shells sent water and mud sky-high. Symes, an artillery signaller, extracted one of my teeth. The walls of the bivvy gradually gave way and the trench flood water rushed down the steps.

Alec and his men were fortunate enough to spend Christmas at Bus Les Artois. Here, the men were sent food and clean clothes from home. Alec would have received clothes from his mother, who was prominent in the Red Cross working parties in Tredworth. The church at Hebuterne became unstable due to shelling, so the Royal Engineers were forced to demolish part of it. Wood wrote of the period:

Dec. 6th - Relieved again. Bus-les-Artois.

Dec. 7th-13th - We all took things very easy. The Signal Section now possessed a gramophone and records. Journeyed into Acheux one night to see the Follies.

Dec. 14th - Back to Hebuterne trenches.

Dec. 15th-22nd - The weather was very squally. Our heavy artillery pounded the Hun trenches daily.

Dec. 23rd - Battalion relieved. Back to Bus.

Dec. 24th - Everyone very energetic making preparations for Christmas.

Dec. 25th - Christmas Day.

Dec. 26th - Attended Brigade Church Service. The Division Band accompanies the hymns.

Alec had not received home leave yet, and must have been missing his family. His two brothers Melville and Thomas had been with him the whole time, which is probably why he felt no pressing need to take leave. The trio spent the New Year period in the trenches together, although in different companies. Wood's diary recounts:

Dec. 29th - The Battalion marched away to Hebuterne 2 days earlier than usual.

Dec. 30th - Our artillery extremely active.

Dec. 31st - Heavy bombardment went on. The enemy's reply was very weak. I was detailed, after many weary months of waiting, to proceed on leave to England. Rain fell incessantly as the Leave Party tramped to Louvencourt. We reached the place at 7.30 pm and joined the Divisional Leave

Squad, as per instructions. At 5 am we paraded at the cook house. Entrained at 6 am. Very very slowly, after some 20 hours in all, our leave train reached Havre.

In January 1916, Alec and the 1/5th Gloucesters were still dug in around Hebuterne. The sector saw an increase in artillery action, as Wood diarised:

Jan. 11th - 9 am, back at Louvencourt.

Jan. 12th - Trailed back to Hebuterne (8 miles) and reached the old familiar dug-out.

Jan. 14th - The enemy bombarded us very freely. Some shells burst just outside the entrance to our dug-out and the fumes were sickening.

Jan. 15th - The Battalion was relieved by the Worcesters mid-day and we returned to Bus-Les-Artois.

Jan. 21st - Off up the line, and took over H.W. Station.

Jan. 22nd - Our artillery ranged their guns on Gommecourt Wood, and bumped a lot of stuff over. The reply was weak.

Jan. 26th - Bus-les-Artois.

Jan. 28th - The Signal Section detailed to proceed to Louvencourt and there assist in the erection of huts.

Jan. 31st - Back in the trenches again.

In February 1916, the German 21 cm Schnelladekanone "Peter Albert" placed a shell in the 5th Gloucesters' canteen. There was a huge explosion, causing bread and jam to be spread everywhere. Luckily there were no casualties. The "Peter Albert" was created from the battleship *Blucher's* reserve armament. The ship was lost at the battle of Dogger Bank, so her reserve guns were mounted on rails. Peter Albert shelled Verdun, and operated in the Somme in October 1916. Germany used these huge guns to shell British and French supply lines. Wood recalled the miserable sleet and snow, as well as the terrible shortage of food at the frontlines:

Feb. 1st-13th - The enemy frequently opened up a hefty cannonade on crumbling Hebuterne with 8-inch and lesser sized shells.

Feb. 14th-18th - The Battalion took over part of the Bucks Battalion's line. Rain set in and surely flooded the dug-out. Watched Howitzer shells bursting on German trenches. None of us had any sleep to speak of.

Feb. 19th - Relieved at last, we trooped off to Courcelles.

Feb. 20th - Indulged in a sprinkler bath at Bus.

Feb. 21st - The Divisional Band played selections in the barn near our billets.

Feb. 23rd - Trenches.

Feb. 24th-March 1st - Rotten time altogether. Fuel extremely scarce. Snow fell continually for days. It had just dawned on the Army Command way back in their cosy chateau that the winter season existed. There was little rejoicing when we did get a bearskin apiece at the 11th hour.

Alec and the other men at the front had to survive on 6 ounces of meat a day due to the German U-Boat naval blockade. The bitter cold, snowy conditions in France, would have added pain to what was already a dire situation for British troops. Their food was often unpalatable, and finding the strength to continue was often a mechanism of survival more than patriotism. Being a rugby player, Alec would have been used to a healthy diet of meat and vegetables; the food in the trenches must have been a shock to his athletic physique.

March was a dreary time for the 1/5th Gloucesters, spending their days in and out of the trenches periodically. Wood recorded that the men were under heavy bombardment from the German artillery:

March 2nd - Relieved. Tramped back to Sailly-au-Bois for the alleged "rest" period.
March 3rd-5th - Snow. The Signal Section engaged the Machine Gun Section in a very formidable snowball battle. The Signals spent their evenings around a log fire in the billet listening to the gramophone.
March 6th - Back to Hebuterne, wallowing in the half-frozen mud. The Battalion took over "G" Sector via the long communication trench known as Vir St. Gatrix.
March 7th-12th - Spent a most unpleasant time. Plenty of snow fell on the 10th.
*March 13th - Our old friend **Sergt. Durrant** killed at 11.30 pm.*
March 14th - Sailly-au-Bois.
March 15th - Flag-wagging and foot drill.
March 16th - A very rough football match took place between 'B' and 'C' Companies.
March 18th - The Battalion occupied the trenches in "G" Sector. The German shelling very severe.
March 25th - Sailly-au-Bois.
March 29th - Cleared up the billet prior to the usual jaunt to Hebuterne.
March 31st - Palf and I were helping ourselves to some tea out of a dixie standing near the entrance to a cellar, and hearing the soft whistle of shells passing through the air the whistling developed into the too familiar swooping noise. Palf flung himself down the cellar steps while I fell prone as the 5 shells burst within a few yards of us. Somebody yelled out that he was wounded, and a stretcher-bearer took charge of the lucky blighter (complete with "Blighty" touch). Nothing remained of the Dixie of tea. My eardrums ceased to function for some hours owing to the nearness of the explosions.

Alec and his men would have had their nerves dampened by the continual bombardment that they were subjected to. They had become accustomed to the explosions and shrapnel that at any point, may take their life. Many men became complacent in these months, and were often picked off by snipers whilst showing an apparent callous and careless disregard or danger. Fortunately, Alec had

The Gloucestershire Echo 28th March 1916 recounted the return home in leave, by Alec's fellow rugby player "Barley" Hughes:

Old Cheltenham Footballer's Sad Homecoming:

*"Barley" Hughes, the old Cheltenham Rugby three-quarters, is home in the town, but we are sorry to hear he has come over on special leave for his mother's funeral in Gloucester. He is looking very fit indeed. He found himself on his work with the 109th Co. R.E.'s close to the 1/5th Gloucesters, and visited their "rest" quarters, renewing acquaintance with old opponents such as Smart, **Alec Lewis**, Hambling, and others. He has been moved now and is with the 1st Constructional Co. R.E.'s much nearer to Ypres.*

Serving with the 109th Company Royal Engineers, Hughes was in close proximity to the 1/5th Gloucesters. He noted the surprisingly large amount of Gloucester rugby players in the 1/5th Gloucesters.

The Cheltenham Chronicle 1st April 1916 mentions the same event:

Old Cheltenham Footballer's Sad Homecoming:

*"Barkley" Hughes, the old Cheltenham Rugby three-quarters, is home in the town but we are sorry to hear he has come over on special leave for his mother's funeral in Gloucester. He is looking very fit indeed. He found himself on his work with the 109th Co. R.E.'s close to the 1/5th Gloucesters, and visited their "rest" quarters, renewing acquaintance with old opponents, such as Smart, **Alec Lewis**, Hambling and others...*

April was a more dangerous period for the battalion, and particularly for Alec. As Wood began the month:

April 2nd - Attended Church Service in the cellar of Pumping Station.

April 4th - Back to Sailly-au-Bois.

April 5th - The Battalion trekked to the anemone-carpeted Couin Woods, and billeted in huts.

April 6th - Enjoyed a concert in the wood given by a talented party.

April 7th - The Divisional Band played.

April 8th - The troupe called 'The Varlets' gave a fine show in the barn.

On the 9th April 1916, the 1/5th Gloucesters were ordered to dig a new trench under the cover of darkness, with the 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. This was an extremely hazardous operation, as not only did the men have to worry about sniper and machine gun fire, but falling into potholes and drowning in the mud was a real threat. Five yards in front of the new trench barbed wire entanglements were to be spread in a distance over a mile, to link the flanks of the Hebuterne salient. In this way, the British lines in some areas, would be brought forwards 60 or 70 yards closer to the German lines. The men needed to work quietly to avoid detection, and with over two thousand men working at once, silence was paramount. The men working in the most exposed positions nearest to the German trenches, were covered with a strong forward patrol of the Royal Berkshire Regiment which lay in the grass ahead of them. Suddenly, the Berkshire patrol came running back to the unfinished trenches of the Gloucesters and the Ox. and Bucks., under the impression that they were under attack. The men in their half-dug trenches stood to, and fixed bayonets ready to defend against the incoming German assault. Fortunately, this was a false alarm, and the men finished the new trench without incident by dawn.

Wood recalled the incident in detail:

April 9th - Sunday. It fell to the lot of the Battalion and the Oxford and Bucks Battalion to undertake a very delicate task; the digging of a trench about a mile long to connect up the extreme flanks of the salient front line at Hebuterne, fixing up barbed wire entanglements along the whole length 5 yards in front of the new trench, and digging pits at intervals to the rear of the trench. The Battalion reached Hebuterne by dark. A strong patrol of the Berkshire Regiment were lying in grass near the German entanglements, on guard covering operations. Hour after hour we worked and the Germans did not show the slightest sign of 'wind-up', a proof of the cat-like method we adopted. The trench and wiring were nearly finished when to our astonishment the Berks patrol came towards us in a panic. Wind-up! Without a word the entire body of men made for the newly made trench and stood with fixed bayonets ready for the onslaught. Not even a grass-hopper approached. The whole operation was finished before the first streak of dawn without a single casualty.

Wood continued to describe the next two days:

April 12th - The Battalion left Couin Wood for Hebuterne to relieve the Bucks Battalion in the line.

April 13th - The Germans poured a stream of hell fire on the new trench and a working party out digging a communication trench to the new line suffered heavy casualties.

On the 15th April 1916, the 1/5th Gloucesters came under bombardment from German 7.58cm Minenwerfers that dropped mortar rounds into the British trenches. To combat this, the men dug bays in the trenches to restrict the effects of the mortar blasts and shrapnel fragments.

Minenwerfers were considered more dangerous than some of the heavier pieces of artillery, as they were more accurate and found their range more easily. The *Fifth Gloucester Gazette* p. 86 contains a casualty list for the 16th April 1916:

154 Sgt. J.C.W. Jennings (Slight) 16/4/16
2594 Pte. G. Russell (Slight) 16/4/16
4393 Pte. C. Hewlett (Slight) 16/4/16
2693 L/Cpl. A.H.T. Lewis (Slight) 16/4/16

The War Diary for the period:

15/4/1916

Fine. Fairly quiet in day. 11.30 pm enemy again bombarded trenches with Minenwerfer and guns of various calibre and at 12.5 am. Casualties five OR and 1 shell shock wounded. Draft 2 NCO's and 11 OR arrived. Strength 34 Officers 888 OR's.

16/4/1916

Fine during day. Casualties 4 OR wounded by shellfire. Enemy shelled at intervals during the night on new and old trenches. Inter-company relief B Coy relieved A Coy and D Coy relieved C Coy.

17/4/1916

Enemy shelled old fire and communication trenches throughout the day with occasional intense outbursts at night. Casualties killed by shellfire:- no. 2811 Pte DANCEY S.E.V. D Coy. no 4358 Pte SMITH A B Coy. no 3008 Pte BROWN N.S. B Coy. no 4427 Pte BERRY W B Coy. (died of wounds 3 hours later) Wounded 5 OR. Weather fine.

Alec was one of the four Other Ranks wounded in the Minenwerfer bombardments. The soldiers deduced that if the fuze of the Minenwerfer burned out at a 45 degree angle to them, then the bomb was most likely going to fall on their position. Another Gloucester player Sid Smart was wounded on the 15th April 1916, with his injury classified as "Slight"; he wrote a letter home to his mother reassuring her that he was recovering in hospital for at least a week. It can be deduced that Alec met the same fate of a short hospitalisation. The *Fifth Gloucester Gazette* made light of the situation in the issue for April 1916 pg. 84:

A Hit of The Season:

Messrs. CRUMP, MINNIE and DUD beg to state that their touring season has now commenced. Having several unbooked dates on their register they are willing to arrange displays at extremely moderate and inclusive terms.

Wood diarised the days like so:

April 15th - About 11 pm the Germans let hell loose on us. The terrific bombardment lasted about 15 minutes. Nerve-racked, we came out at 3 am.

Apr 16th - I rested. Sergt. Jennings was wounded, and Cpl. Fred Reeves took charge of the Signal Section.

Apr 17th - I was detailed to accompany Bill Hopkins on a telephone wiring stunt out to the new trench in the evening. Forgetful of the steel-helmet, I left the dug-out wearing a soft hat. Bill and I walked out into No Man's Land along a water-logged sap, passing through a zig-zag secret path to the other side of the wide belt of barbed wire entanglements. A heavy storm of rain broke over us.

Bill had connected up some fresh wires at a point midway between the old and new trench, and went off to the pit some distance away, leaving me alone. I saw the wide familiar cordon of flashes extending some miles along the German horizon. I immediately flung myself bodily in a 5.9 shell-hole which was half full of water, and tried to bury as much of myself as possible in the thick muddy sides of the crater. As shells burst nearer and red-hot shrapnel plonked around in the sodden ground, I saw no possible chance of my getting away alive. A "Minnie" burst just to my right, rending the air for 7 or 8 seconds with the fearful crashing din of its explosion, and showering me with mud and water. 20 minutes I endured thus, and to my immense relief the German batteries ceased to fire. I then crawled in the mud towards the new trench and continued my way towards the pit where I knew Bill was waiting, keeping well to the side. Bill and I made up our minds to dash back together. We had run about half way and the German batteries opened up another bombardment. We fell flat in the mud and hoped for the best. This strafe was not so intense as the previous one and lasted for only 10 minutes, but quite long enough. We wormed our way to the wire and found the gap through the entanglements. Bill and I negotiated the sloppy, muddy sap with careful strides and reached the Company Signal Station in the original front line. I was about to enter the dug-out when I heard, with a start, our batteries on the Plain open up a bombardment in reprisal. The sudden blast of the cannonade set up a violent reaction on my nerves which had been shattered, and I fell into the dug-out in a state of hysteria. Fred Reeves and Wally Deavin made a dixie of cocoa for Bill and I, and endeavoured to brighten me up. After a few hours rest in the bunk, Fred escorted me to HQ Signal Station in the village. The doctor gave me a few quinine tablets to go on with!

Apr 18th - Convalescent at HQ, but feeling much better after a night's sleep.

Apr 20th - The Battalion was relieved and marched to Couin Woods. The billeting area in the woods, where the huts stood, was churned up by our predecessors into a regular slush. Listened to the Divisional Band in the afternoon.

Apr 21st - At mid-day, the Battalion tramped back to Sailly-Au-Bois and took over strange billets in an out-of-the-way place.

Apr 22nd-30th - Beautiful weather prevailed. Ernie Biles and Bill Pracher were appointed Cooks-Extraordinary to the Section, and the meals they dished up were quite good.

The Gloucester Journal 22nd April 1916 narrates a match between the 1/5th Gloucesters and the 1/4th Gloucesters:

Rugby Football at the Front:

5th Gloucesters' Good Win:

Suring a spell from the trenches the 1/5th Battalion met the 1/4th, in splendid weather, and before a large number of troops, including many officers. The 5th fielded a strong team, including many well-known city and county players. The game opened with some pretty movements by the 5th backs, Sysum and Hamblin shining. Early in the game Lieut. Pearce broke away and dashed over with a splendid try, Cook failing to convert. This try was followed shortly after by a brilliant try from Sysum after neat handling by the backs. Cook converting. At half-time the 5th led by 8 points to nil. On the restart the 4th forwards played a rattling good game, but were beaten back for possession in the scrums, their backs thus getting few opportunities. After a nice run and opening by Hamblin, Smart crossed, but was pulled up for an infringement. Sergt. Jennings then crossed with a good try after a forward rush. The 5th now pressed hard, and from a scrum the backs handled splendidly. Hamblin, receiving, beat man after man, working the "dummy" successfully, and eventually crossing with a brilliant try. Cook converted. Shortly before the end, the 4th

forwards broke away with a rush, Capt. Hale crossing and Lieut. Hawkins converting with a neat kick.

Result:

1/5th Gloucesters- 2 goals, 2 tries (16 pts)

1/4th Gloucesters- 1 goal (5 points)

The 4th played a sterling game, but were outclassed. The winners' backs were in splendid form, Hamblin being the shining light. His try was the tit-bit of the match. Lieut. Hawkins was the pick of the 4th backs. The 5th forwards were ably led by Lieut. W.J. Pearce, Smart and Jennings were much in evidence throughout the game.

The following represented the 1/5th: - Pte. C. Cook; Lce – Corpl. Washbourne, Lce – Corpl. L. Hamblin, Lce – Corpl. Alec Lewis, and Sergt. Speck; Lce – Corpl. T. Lewis and Lce – Corpl. S. Sysum; Lieut. W.J. Pearce, Lce – Corpl. W. Dovey, Lce – Corpl. S. Smart, Sergt. J. Meadows, Sergt. W. Jennings, Sergt. Boughton, Lce – Corpl. W. Parham, and Pte. Lewis.

The 1/5th Gloucesters' back line including Alec at three-quarters, performed outstandingly once again. The weather in which the match was played, would have been much more comfortable than the winter months. This would have been a welcome relief.

Cheltenham Chronicle 22nd April 1916:

...Although football in this part of the country is now a dead letter, we can confidently look forward after the war to seeing games equally meritorious to those we have witnessed in the past, for the players who have donned the khaki seldom miss an opportunity of keeping fit and retaining their form. A number of the Gloucester City men who are serving with the 1/5th Gloucesters in France, during a spell from the trenches, recently had an opportunity of once more getting into harness and reviving the memories of the past. They met a team representing the 1/4th Gloucesters, whom they defeated by 2 goals, 2 tries (16 pts) to 1 goal (5 pts) and from the accounts we have received, the City men appear to have been in excellent form. The backs played well, and Hamblin showed much ability, his try being the outstanding feature of the game. Lieut. W.J. Pearce ably led the attack, and received most valuable assistance from Smart and Jennings. Lieut. Hawkins was the pick of the 4th backs. The game opened with some effective movements by the 3rd backs, in which Sysum and Lieut. Pearce got away and scored a try, which Cook failed to convert. The latter, however, was successful with the kick following Sysum's brilliant try. In the second moiety, after an opening by Hamblin, Smart crossed, but the points were nullified by an infringement. Sergt. Jennings scored a try after a forward rush, and subsequently Hamblin, receiving from a scrum, beat man after man, working the "dummy" successfully, and scored a brilliant try, which Cook converted. Shortly before time the 4th forwards broke away with a rush, and Capt. Hale crossed and Lieut. Hawkins converted. The 5th were represented by the following: Pte. C. Cook; Lce – Corpl. Washbourne, Lce – Corpl. L. Hamblin, Lce – Corpl. Alec Lewis, and Sergt. Speck; Lce – Corpl. T. Lewis and Lce – Corpl. S. Sysum; Lieut. W.J. Pearce, Lce – Corpl. W. Dovey, Lce – Corpl. S. Smart, Sergt. J. Meadows, Sergt. W. Jennings, Sergt. Boughton, Lce – Corpl. W. Parham, and Pte. Lewis.

Both Alec and his younger brother Melville represented the 1/5th Gloucesters in this match.

On the 12th May 1916, the Gloucesters were ordered to dig a cable trench for the Royal Engineers, six feet deep. The trench having been dug to the required depth, and the cable having been laid, the

soldiers began backfilling their excavation. However, it was decided that more cables needed to be laid in the trench, and so the soldiers re-excavated what they had filled; much to their annoyance. Having finished the trench, the soldiers trudged back to Coigneux looking forward to a hearty breakfast. However, on arrival in the mess, they found the cooks drunk on rum rations, and their breakfast unprepared. No doubt Alec would have been less than impressed with this setback, and as a Lance-Corporal, would have had to discipline unsettled men.

Between the 19th-30th May 1916, the 1/5th Gloucesters rested behind the lines at Beauval for rest, recreation and training. On the 23rd May 1916, the 2/5th Gloucesters arrived in France to reinforce the 1/5th. Wood recorded the next month:

May 1st - Left Sailly for the trenches. I took over Station J.Z. The Battalion relieved the R. Berks. Members of the London Division manned parts of the front line, while some were stationed in Hebuterne itself.

May 2nd-6th - Nothing of military importance happened.

May 7th - Sunday. Attended service in cellar. Rev. Meek preached.

May 10th - The Battalion was relieved by the Bucks Battalion and marched to Coigneux. Housed in tents, ten "thick" in each.

May 12th - At sundown, the Battalion marched to Hebuterne for the purpose of digging a lengthy cable trench across a portion of "G" Sector for our esteemed pals the Royal Engineers. Picks and spades were doled out at Sailly on the way up, and everyone seemed eager to capture the lightest implement to work with. "Whacker" Phillips would have chosen a cardboard spade if such a variety had graced the dump. Spreading ourselves out along the route of the proposed trench line, the Blue and White Banded Engineers acting as Formen, each of us started digging out allotted span.

May 13th - Met my brother, Ernest, who had joined the Battalion with other reinforcements.

May 15th - The Battalion left for Authie. Arrived 11am.

May 18th - The 145th Brigade marched to Beauval. Lovely weather.

May 19th-30th - Our stay at Beauval was exceedingly jolly throughout. The Brigade was stationed here for the long-expected rest, with plenty of training thrown in. "Housey Housey" (the only game of chance approved by the Army Council) found numerous devotees in the Beauval Estaminets. The Divisional Band gave frequent concerts in the Square. Towards the latter part of our stay at Beauval, the Doctor got a move on with his needle and inoculated all and sundry.

May 31st - The 145th Brigade left Beauval at an early hour and marched to Coulonvillers. We had breakfast on the road. The distance covered was about 14 miles.

Here, Alec would have had his first contact with the Royal Berkshire Regiment, of which he was to become a hero in the coming months. Wood's entries allude to overcrowding accommodation on the road to Coigneux, as well as the pointlessness of the battalion's labour duties under the Royal Engineers. However, it was clear that morale was high amongst the men, who were well rested and able to gamble in Beauval.

Wood recorded for June 1916:

June – St Riquier. The Battalion assisted in preparations for the July offensive. All roads leading to the line were alive with moving transport, troops, howitzer batteries, field guns, long range pieces earmarked for the mission, "kill at any price".

It was clear that Alec and the other men of the 5th Gloucesters were preparing for the massive Allied assault on the Somme. As a sharp and educated man, Alec would have been acutely aware of the

vast build up of troops and the trouble brewing in France. North east of Abbeville, St Riquier lies in the Picardie region and Alec would have seen its antique hotels, church and abbey.

With the 5th Gloucesters at Home and Overseas takes up the story over July:

July 1st - 145th Brigade and 144th Brigade in reserve to the VIII Corps. Dawn was breaking when the Battalion passed the outskirts of Hebuterne on its way to Mailly Maillet. Our Batteries cannonade was at full blast. Enemy shells were seen frequently bursting over Hebuterne. Scotch troops were holding the line there, ready to attack at a given signal right along the front. Numerous observation balloons peopled the skies.

July 2nd - The Battalion bivouacked on the fringe of Mailly Maillet. Prior to moving off in the evening to attack Thiepval, Rev. Helm conducted Holy Communion Service on some rising ground just beyond the camp. Under the cover of night the Battalion marched to a point within a mile of their rendezvous. A very liberal rum issue took place. I went off with another Signaller to find Brigade HQ in order to secure a few reels of telephone wire. We passed a Field Ambulance on the way, and the road was lined for some distance with rows of stretcher-cases. Here and there one noticed a motionless form swathed in blankets. It was a grim, sad sight. Gas alarm given! German gas drifting slowly towards us. Put on respirators. On rejoining the Battalion we learned that the attack was postponed.

July 4th-18th - The Battalion returned to Hebuterne. Usual trench routine. Ample evidence of the fruitless attack by the Scotch troops on July 1st.

July 19th - The Welsh Division relieved the 48th Division in this portion of the line. The Battalion trekked to Bouzincourt.

Luckily for Alec and the men, they had been spared the slaughter of the 1st July 1916. 57,470 casualties were suffered that day with 19,240 men killed across the British line. It appears that Alec even avoided a secondary attack the next day and would have enjoyed an extra helping of rum without the bloodshed that usually followed. Alec's nerves must have been frayed by this point expecting to be sent over the top for two days in a row, wondering when he might meet his end. To make matters worse, Alec would have seen the decimated Tyneside Scottish Brigade fresh from their heavy bleeding on the Somme. One can only imagine how he related to such a gory scene.

Wood recounted in gory detail the movement of the men through the La Boisselle battlefield:

July 20th - The Battalion left for Ovillers-La-Boisselle to engage in the Battle of the Somme. Passing through Albert one noticed the shell-torn church. In the vicinity of La Boisselle one saw the battlefield of July 1st. One heroic group of dead met my gaze on the left of the road. They were all Lewis gunners, and their officer lay out-stretched in the centre of them. The long winding German trench leading to Ovillers-la-Boisselle was littered with German corpses. The relieved Battalion of Worcesters filed past us in the trench, and many of them were in a state of hysteria. HQ Details made a temporary harbour in a spacious down-sloping dugout - fitted up by the Germans as a Dressing Station. At the far end stood the operating table, while on the floor were scattered the ghastly remnants thrown down by the surgeon. The stench was terrible. We all filed into this fearful place until the dugout was packed with men. Most of us threw off our kits. Ten minutes elapsed, and to our horror the gas alarm was raised. I went "cold", for it was a couple of minutes before I could find my respirator in the darkness amongst the jumbled kits. It turned out to be a false alarm. The Battalion held a portion of a Communication trench leading to Sky Line Trench, while the Germans held the remaining length. A thick barrier of Hun dead thrown up by the Germans separated the combatants.

La Boisselle saw the highest casualties of the entire July 1916 offensive on the Somme, where the 34th Division had been mauled significantly. Alec would have borne witness to some of the most horrendous sights on the Western Front over the entirety of the war. The sweet stench of bloated bodies wafted across the men's noses as they gagged at the carnage in front of them. Again Alec's own mortality would have been severely questioned at this point and it is a wonder that he was able to continue fighting throughout this period.

As Wood resumes, Alec and "C" Company were back in the thick of trouble:

July 21st-29th - Ensued nights of fierce fighting, the Battalion's objective being Sky Line Trench. Mills bombs and rifle grenades were chiefly used. One night "C" Company were lying out in the open ready to attack directly our artillery barrage fell, but the Germans "smelt a rat" and dropped their curtain of fire on our fellows a quarter of an hour before our attack was due to commence. The order was given "every man for himself." My brother was one of the few to get back into the communication trench unscathed. I was at the Signalling Lamp Station some hundred yards away with at that time Harry Blackwell, Mackeller, and Ray Hillyard. Shells burst all round the sap where we crouched. Many of the signallers, bandsmen, sappers and others were called upon to assist in stretcher-bearing one morning after a big fight. On the way up to the Dressing Station we passed scores of stretcher cases being taken to a Field Ambulance. Among them I recognised our esteemed Capt. R.J.C. Little, Commander of "B" Company his face drawn and deadly pale.

The mayhem that Alec would have found himself in out in the open and as a corporal, in command of a section of men, would have been indescribable. It appears that the battalion engaged in close-quarters fighting which Alec was to later prove himself a specialist at. In the chaos of battle, he had cheated death but had not returned unscathed. He had been wounded by a gunshot in the attack. Alec must have proved his gallantry through these engagements as he was shortly promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and commissioned into the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Wood rounds out July 1916:

July 30th - The Battalion was relieved by the Bucks Battalion. With sorely depleted ranks, the Battalion marched to a small camp on the outskirts of Albert for the night. On the way to the camp I looked back towards the line and beheld one long blazing inferno of bursting shells out of which streamed countless very lights.

July 31st - The Battalion marched miles back to the peaceful village of Cramont.

The reason for Alec's departure from his beloved 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment, was extremely horrific. July's fighting had cost him two brothers killed two days apart. Thomas Henry Raymond Lewis was killed in action 21st July 1916, and Melville Edward Lionel was killed in action 23rd July 1916. Both were commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. Alec's parents must have been distraught hearing the news of their sons' deaths and worried for about a similar fate that might lie in store for him too. For Alec to have the mental fortitude to lose two brothers and continue to fight on is heroic and very characteristic of the patriotism of the time.

The Gloucestershire Citizen recorded a speech that the Reverend G.F. Helm gave on the 12th April 1926 after Sidney Brown passed away from injuries sustained during a Gloucester rugby match. During this speech, the reverend paid homage to Alec's brothers and all the other Gloucestershire men who were made casualties during the same attack:

"...no one was surprised when the whole of the Gloucester Fifteen joined up at the outbreak of war. Many of them enlisted in the 5th Gloucesters and they paid a heavy toll in that battalion alone. It

would take [me] a long time to tell all their exploits but [I can] recall that sterling forward Sidney Millard and also Tom and Melville Lewis, whose names are inscribed on the war memorial in the Lady Chapel of [All Saints Church]. The Gloucester Fifteen were doubtless proud of the fact that of the four men who reached a German trench beyond Owillers-La Boisselle [i.e. Pozières] in July 1916 after three days of terrible fighting, three were members of the Gloucester Fifteen and were the three men [I have] named. Sid Sysum scored his last try and there were many others [I] could mention. [I think that these men] had learned to endure hardship as good soldiers because they had learned to take knocks in the game of which they were masterly exponents..."

Alec's promotion was announced in the Birmingham Daily Post 28th August 1916:

Infantry:

Lce.-corpl. A.H.T. Lewis, from Glouc. R., T.F. (July 31)

Alec was recognised that same day in the Gloucestershire Echo 28th August 1916:

Commissions:

Lance-Cpl. A.H.W. Lewis, of a Gloucestershire Service Battalion, has received a commission in the Royal Berkshire Regt.

A few days later the Gloucester Journal 2nd September 1916:

Local Commissions:

...Royal Berkshire Regt.- Lance-Corpl. A.H.T. Lewis from Gloucester Regt. (T.F.), to be temp. 2nd Lieut. (on prob.) (July 31).

Cheltenham Chronicle 2nd December 1916:

Extracts From The London Gazette:

2693 Lance-Corpl. A.H.T. Lewis, from 1/5th Batt. Gloucestershire Regiment. To be Temp.-Sec.-Lieut., dated 31/7/16.

For Alec, the promotion would have meant better pay and more perks such as a batman. Whilst handing him more responsibility, his commission meant that he was able to exact revenge upon the enemy with more control than before. The 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment had suffered a great number of casualties during July 1916 as The War Diary of the 6th Berkshire Regiment 31st July 1916 elucidates:

Marched to new billets at EECKE - SW of GODVIRSVELDE and arrived at 12 noon. For casualties during operations list of casualties attached. [attached list of casualties] CASUALTIES During Bombardment - to 30.6.16 2/Lt RJF REMNANT - wounded OR 7 killed 45 wounded During attack - 1st and 2nd July Capt R LITTEN - Killed Lieut KR TRAILL - " 2/Lt TA COLLOT - " " GM COURAGE - " " EC BAYLY - " " CK HOWE - " " NB SOUPER - " Capt VG McARTHUR - wounded " HGF LONGHURST - " 2/Lt LH SAYE " " GWH NICOLSON " " JV McLEAN " OR 71 Killed 254 Wounded 11 Missing Major TC HINCKS Wounded 9.7.16 At MONTAUBAN - 14th July OR Killed 2 Wounded 16 Missing 3 At LONGUEVAL 19th and 20th July 2/Lt WV BURGESS Killed " HP SADLER " " CJ FULLER Died of Wounds Capt AH HUDSON Wounded 2/Lt JM RICHARDSON " " AJ FOX " " CH HUNT " " SR COLLIER Missing believed killed. OR Killed 27 Wounded 127 Missing 30 2/Lt JV MURPHY - Accidentally wounded 19.7.16

From the 1st August 1916 until the 5th August 1916, Alec and the battalion remained at these billets at Eecke close to the Belgian border with France. The War Diary on the 5th August 1916 states:

Brigade moved by route march to ESTAIRES arriving 10AM.

On the 6th August 1916 the War Diary records:

Battalion in billets - Bathing carried out.

A four hour march from Eecke, the town of Estaires was the hub of a significant textiles industry in Northern France. By the time that Alec would have reached it, the bustling industrial town had been reduced to a wasteland. The factories levelled and the houses empty, cleared about by German bombardments. The town was to become so significantly destroyed during the course of the war, that it was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French government at its conclusion. Alec and his men would have appreciated the warm baths and relative safety of the billets in Estaires regardless of the destruction surrounding them.

Alec spent the 7th August 1916 training with his new company. At nearly 30-years old and battle-hardened, Alec's new company would have looked up to him for experience and knowledge. This bonding time would be crucial in battle at later stages, as non-commissioned officers and other ranks were required to trust their junior officers. Given that Alec was a renowned athlete and had earned his commission with gallantry rather than purchased it, he would have been seen as a role model by his men and rightly so.

On the 8th August 1916 the battalion was on the move southwards again as the War Diary states:

Bde moved by route march – 6th R Berks at LA BOUDRELLE huts

The 9th August 1916 to the 11th August 1916 was spent training in companies:

Coy training in vicinity of camp

On the 12th August 1916, the battalion marched to Bailleul:

Bde moved to camp at BAILLEUL by route march

Bailleul was a village on the Franco-Belgian border briefly occupied by the Germans in October 1914. After it was retaken, the town was used as a rear supply depot; an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. The 2nd Casualty Clearing Station, 3rd Casualty Clearing Station, 8th Casualty Clearing Station, 11th Casualty Clearing Station, 53rd Casualty Clearing Station, 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station and 1st Australian Casualty Clearing Station were quartered in the areas for long periods of time. A fairy figure adorned the cathedral bell tower that watched over the town and far from the front lines; Alec may have felt the angle's gaze.

Rumblings by the commanding officer of the 53rd Brigade of which the 6th Berkshire Regiment was a part of were recorded in the war diary for 13th August 1916:

In Camp. Inspected by Brigade Commander. Preparations made for Inspection by HM the King

For a patriotic Alec, the appearance of King George V on the battlefield would have provided a boost to his morale at a time when the British Army as a whole needed it desperately.

On the 14th August 1916, Alec and the battalion demonstrated a show of their force and discipline to the king as the War Diary records:

Coy training. Inspected at taking and consolidating a trench by HM the King.

From the 15th August 1916 to the 18th August 1916 the War Diary records:

Bn trained in attack

Alec would have had his focus during these drills. As a 2nd Lieutenant, he was an integral part of any infantry attack, commanding fifty men or a platoon. He would have had to keep touch with the other platoons of his company whilst under heavy fire and immense pressure.

On the 19th August 1916 the war diary has the 6th Berkshire Regiment on a route march, and on the 20th August 1916 the men received a church parade and some well-earned rest.

From the 21st August 1916 to the 24th August 1916, the battalion trained in companies. On the 25th August 1916 the War Diary records:

Bn trained from Bailleul station to Dieval station and marched to billets at Guestraville

On the 26th August 1916 the battalion had a rest day and on the 27th August 1916 the War Diary stated:

Bn Bathed at TINCQUES - Coy training in afternoon. 2Lts Basset & Ravenor and 12 OR joined from Base.

Fifteen miles west of Arras, Tincques was a small town containing the church of St Hilaire, a chateau and a farmhouse all of these dating from the 17th century.

From the 28th August 1916 to the 8th September 1916 the battalion trained in musketry and fieldwork. Over this period the battalion was bulked up with: 98 men of the Lincoln Regiment on the 3rd September 1916 and 399 men from the Cambridgeshire Regiment and Hertfordshire Regiment on the 7th September 1916. It was clear to Alec and his men that the brigade was preparing for another attack. They would have to enjoy the calm whilst it lasted.

On the 9th September 1916 the War Diary reported:

Bn moved by Bde march route to SERICOURT - start 7AM arrive 3.30PM. 108 men of last two drafts fell out.

On the 10th September 1916 the War Diary continues:

Bn moved by Bde route march to GROUCHES - start 6.30AM arrive 1PM. 10 men fell out. Pte Middleton tried by FGCM. Draft of 20 OR joined from Base.

Pte Middleton had been sentenced to death by field general court martial, a fate usually metered out to mutineers and other treasonous soldiers. One would imagine that with the boredom and low morale of 1916, this would have been more common than in the previous year.

On the 11th September 1916 the War Diary reported:

Bn moved by Bde route march to LE ALVILLERS start 6.30AM arrive 1PM. 2 men fell out. Draft of 10 men rejoined from Base.

On the 12th August 1916, the 18th Division was amalgamated with II Corps and the 6th Berkshire Regiment trained near their billets. They continued training until the 17th September 1916 when the War Diary reports:

Bn moved by route march to ACHEUX in morning and in afternoon to BOUZINCOURT arrived at 6PM.

On the 18th September 1916:

Bn moved back to FORCEVILLE arriving 4PM.

On the 19th September 1916 the War Diary wrote:

Coy training at LEALVILLERS. Major CROOKENDEN DSO joined as 2nd in Comd. Major FENNER to A Coy. 2Lt Freeman to D Coy.

Lealvillers was a tiny village in the Picardy region a few miles from Amiens that the men remained training in until the 24th September 1916. It must be noted that the War Diary read on the 23rd/24th September 1916, that the battalion was training for a specific attack in Thiepval:

Bn training at LEALVILLERS. Attack on reproduction of THIEPVAL

Alec and his men were training for an attack on Thiepval. This was a crucial ridge on the Somme that had not been taken on the 1st July 1916, where an ill-fated attack was launched and subsequently cut down by German machine gun fire. The 18th Division was given the task of taking both Thiepval and the Schwaben Redoubt to the north. The Schwaben redoubt was situated on the northernmost and highest position of the Thiepval ridge, and was built in 1915 by the Germans who occupied the area. The redoubt was comprised of a network of trenches with deep dugouts, command posts, first aid posts, signalling stations, and strong points with three heavy machine guns and four light machine guns. The perimeter trenches were: Irwin, Lucky Way, Stuff, Hessian, Marin's line and Strasburg Line. Schwaben Redoubt was triangular and very well-fortified.

On the 25th September 1916 the War Diary read:

Bn moved to BLIGHTY VALLEY - N of AVALUY and bivouacked for the night in AUTHVILLE WOOD. "Don" Coy went in advance and was employed on carrying for the Brigade.

On the 26th September 1916 the battalion took over the old front line area in reserve for the attack on Thiepval. As the War Diary noted:

Bn moved up to WOODPOST and the old British & German front lines. D Coy ration company for the Brigade. Brigade attacked & took THIEPVAL. Bn was in reserve and was not called upon to fight. The Bn less "B" Coy employed carrying stores and digging for the Brigade. All carrying parties suffered casualties 1 killed 2 wounded.

Held in reserve at Crucifix Corner, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment was called upon to provide carrying parties bringing supplies, water, food and ammunition to the front line. Private Jennings of the battalion wrote:

On the 26th September at 1235 the first waves of the assault moved forward at a slow walk. We of the 6th Berks were in reserve dug-outs at Crucifix Corner. Then it was our turn and we made our way forward in small columns to Thiepval, unmolested in broad daylight. Dusk was creeping up fast and then came the biggest barrage Jerry ever sent over. This went on throughout the hours of darkness till dawn. The trenches we were in must have been a terrible hot spot during the past few weeks, for buried in its walls were dozens of bodies, both British and German, rotting in the wet earth. That evening the 6th Berks worked throughout the night, in parties, carrying food, water, ammunition and stores to the forward line where the troops awaited their arrival with eagerness. Daylight gave us the opportunity of looking further afield. A huge crater came into our view about 50 yards away. The occupants were the dead of the soldiers who made the advance on the 1st July, nearly three months before. We were about to retreat to the trench when our Captain came across to reprimand us for being away from our position. Then he ordered us to search the bodies for their personal belongings, paybooks etc. This helped to clear up the 'Missing, believed Killed' We found that they were Dorsets. It wasn't a pleasant task. A few hours later our barrage on the enemy line opened up. 10th Essex went over the top first, then the 6th Berks in close support. The 10th Essex had done extremely well but suffered heavy losses. The 6th Berks relieved them the next day and went into the captured trenches at Thiepval. Because I was in a Lewis gun team of six we were allocated a dug-out. It was wonderful. It must have been about 20 ft in length, linked up by galleries to other dug-outs along the line.

It would be unlikely that Alec was called upon to carry as an officer although he had a harder task at hand. He was now approaching battle with a unit of men made up almost completely of drafts from other regiments. Although he had some time to train with his new soldiers, Alec would not have felt the same cohesion within his platoon as he did with the 5th Gloucestershire Regiment at the start of the war.

The War Diary for the 27th September 1916 takes up the story again:

Suffolks attacked SCHWABEN Redoubt and took their objective. Bn kept in readiness to move up in THIEPVAL - AUTHUILLE WOOD VALLEY. Out all day and night in readiness for counter attack 1 killed 5 wounded.

This attack would have been an ominous sign for Alec and his men who were soon to fight in these very same trenches.

On the 28th September 1916, the battalion moved up to the front line and suffered much hardship in the progress as the War Diary records:

Bn moved up at dawn and took over front of Essex & Suffolks from R20c27 to R20d1.0. B coy front line - D Coy counter attack in BULGAR TRENCH - C Coy support in BULGARS and NAMELESS TRENCH - A in Reserve in SCHWABEN TR. Bn HQ at R26c3.4. Heavily shelled all day - men suffering from want of sleep. Casualties 2Lt WB Chapman wounded. Wounded 6 OR missing 3 OR.

Private Jennings makes note of the situation:

On the 28th September the 6th Berks composed entirely of recently joined recruits were in Brigade Reserve in Authuille, carrying supplies for the assault on the Schwaben Redoubt. It was here that the Battalion had a wounded Jerry who became a sort of mascot, being handed over to each relieving platoon until he was got away by the stretcher bearers. The week that followed was the usual routine. At dusk everybody lined the firestep and throughout the night each of us took a turn of one hour on, two off. Then, at last, we got it. We suspected a counter-attack for Jerry chucked over every type of explosive he had until the trench was almost flattened.

Although tired and nervous, Alec could not forget his duty of care to his platoon and throughout the moving process had to be alert and firmly in command.

Captain Rochford the battalion adjutant wrote of the move up into the front lines:

The general line here faced north and the communication trenches were really only two old German communication trenches between Thiepval and Schwaben. There were no traverses in either of these trenches and both were in view from the Schwaben Redoubt. As a consequence a visit to the front line was a most unpleasant affair. Add to this the fact that the Germans attempted to bomb down these trenches three or four times a day and that they were well supplied with egg bombs, while our supply of Mills bombs, which were the only reply to an egg bomb, was very limited and it will be realised that the days we spent holding Thiepval were somewhat exciting.

The danger and suspense in the air was palpable and the stage was set for some of the fiercest fighting of the Somme campaign.

The shelling of the 6th Berkshire Regiment continued as the War Diary for the 29th September 1916 reported:

Bn in line - no change - shelled periodically throughout the day Casualties killed 6 - wounded 49 - missing 5.

On the 30th September 1916, the excitement was to come the way of Alec and his unit. The Germans counter-attacked at dawn, 0445 hrs. Alec and the battalion bombers were sent to reinforce the 8th East Surrey Regiment, which was being overrun. As a battalion bomber, Alec was personally responsible for the actions that took place on this day. The Berkshire Chronicle carried an account of this day in its edition on the 5th January 1917:

The Battalion was in reserve to ----- who first of all made the charge. Three lines of the enemies tranches were quickly taken and a portion of the redoubt, which was very large. The Germans were strongly re-enforced and made a counter attack. The Berks were rushed up to deal with it and after an engagement which lasted upwards of an hour, they were successful in achieving their object. The fighting consisted almost exclusively of fierce bombing attacks. The Germans put up a very stubborn fight until they were bombed out of their position. The losses they sustained were heavy while those of the Berks were comparatively light. Nearly 600 prisoners alone were taken and the great majority of these surrendered. "As a result of our success we were able to take the other portion of the redoubt" said one informant "We had three tanks in action, one of which the enemy succeeded in putting out of action. In the trenches we found German rifles with no bayonets on them. The Germans were in very strong numbers. Their repulse first of all was due to the brilliant charge made by the two other battalions and then the Berks splendid bombing work which completely nonplussed them.

The War Diary for the same day was relatively brief:

Bosche counte- attacked against pt 27 at dawn, 4.45AM. Strong bombing parties forced pt 27 and reached a pt 180yds S of it. Bn bombers sent up and drove Bosche back with Mills 23s. E Surrey attack in afternoon failed. Heavily shelled all day. A Coy relieved B in front line. Cas. Major CROOKENDEN DSO wounded - 2Lt BEBEE killed - 8 OR killed - 53 wounded - 4 missing.

Alec would have been an integral part of commanding these bombing parties in action.

On the 1st October 1916, the War Diary places the battalion holding firm:

Battn holding the line. Heavily shelled during the day. 2/Lt GC FREEMAN killed. 2/Lt WG DYMOKE died of wounds. Line held from R.20.c.15 to R.20.D.10. 7th RW SURREY RGT on left. A Battn of 11th Division on our right.

The situation became desperate again on the 2nd October 1916, as the 6th Berkshire Regiment came under attack from enemy grenade attacks as the War Diary explains:

Bn holding the line. At 7am the enemy made bombing attacks against the junction of SCHWABEN REDOUBT & Bns front line. Chiefly against the Bn on our left. Bn bomber sent up to co-operate & succeeded in driving the enemy back & retaking the portion of the line on our left which they had gained. 2/Lt GC Welch wounded & evacuated.

Again Alec was rushed to the coalface to force the enemy back. For the second time in consecutive days, the British front line had called upon Alec to fight close-quarters with enemies barely metres away from him. The typical British bombing team consisted of a sergeant, two bomb-throwers, two bomb-carriers, two bayonet-men and two other men for general duties or to carry wounded. Alec would have commanded several of these teams as he rushed forwards to plug the gaps in the line. Hurling grenades was exhausting work and Alec was chosen for this task due to his impeccable fitness and hand-eye coordination. With explosions and sharp fragments of shrapnel crashing around him, Alec and his men forced the Germans to withdraw.

The War Diary on 3rd October 1916 is comparatively calm:

Battn still holding the line. Heavy shelling throughout the day otherwise quiet on the Bn front.

This calm was not to last as the Germans ordered a huge counter-attack with grenades and flamethrowers. Alec came to the fore and was incredibly gallant amongst the explosions and smell of burning flesh. The War Diary for the 4th October 1916 explains:

At dawn the enemy made strong bombing attacks against our left flank & had Flammenwerfer co-operating. He broke through on our left & occupied 100yds of trench S of point 27. Strong bombing parties were organised & sent up & attacked the enemy from 3 sides namely the front line, Martins way and SCHWABEN Redoubt & ground lost was regained, & a block was established 100yds N of point 27 & heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy. 2/Lt LEWIS and the Bn bombers did specially good work during this attack. The remainder of the day some shelling but otherwise quiet.

Alec had to not only hold his own line but also command a three-pronged grenade assault against the German lines. He would have been exhausted from this intense and sharp fight. The fierce fighting continued into the next day as the War Diary 5th October 1916 takes up the story:

At 1am a carrying party of Yeomanry arrived at Bn HQ with bombs for front line. These were found to be undetonated. A portion were sent up & the Bn Bombers put on detonating them. The remainder were dumped and a large party started detonating. When they had done this detonated bombs were sent up to the front line and all available Mills No 23 Rifle Grenades were also sent up. At 7-30am 8th NORFOLK R bombing attack commenced. Enemy out-threw the NORFOLKS with egg bombs & for some time gained considerable advantage. The Bn Bombers under 2/Lt LEWIS & bombing squads of A & D Coys were sent up & after several hours hard bombing managed to retake ground lost. The whole line was re-established by 2-30pm. At 4-30pm relief by the 17th Sherwood Foresters commenced, & was completed by 5-50pm & the Bn

withdrew by route march & lorry to HEADAUVILLE. Total casualties of OR from 27-9-16 to 6-10-16 :- 201.

Alec had been let down by logistics as his grenades did not have detonators in them but he did not allow this to deter him from his duties. He again showed his conspicuous gallantry, fitness and devotion to duty as he fought for fourteen hours continuously. Such was the ferocity of Alec's fight, that all available grenades were sent to him as he and the battalion bombers hurled all that they had at the enemy to dislodge them from their positions taken the day previously. One can only imagine the relief that Alec felt when the battalion was relieved and he could finally rest.

The Reading Mercury of the 28th July 1917 added a postscript to these events:

Having taken over the line from the French, the battalion experienced a very trying time with the mud and water. A move was made further to the right, south of Peronne, and when the Germans were evacuating their positions, the battalion was one of the first to go over the Somme. "We found everything blown up", said a sergeant "and we had to go over the Somme on planks"

When we occupied the enemy's old lines, just beyond we found that nearly all of their dug-outs had been set alight and were burning furiously. In some of the dug-outs we discovered a quantity of furniture, but generally the Germans had cleared everything out systematically and there was hardly a thing to be seen. All the villages had been devastated and burnt down; in fact the scene that was witnessed was one of desolation. In one village some French working people, on returning to their old habitations - which alas were practically a pile of ruins - unearthed several hundred bottles of wine which they happened to leave there before the enemy occupied it and which they apparently did not discover.

Second Lt T H Baker was wounded by a German sniper whilst patrolling the line as was Sergeant Clover, who was with him. Sergeant Major Woodhouse, who was with A Coy was killed by a trench mortar [on 2/10/16] whilst we were in the sector which was taken over from the French, whilst Cpl Batten, who belongs to Wallingford, had a remarkable escape. He was standing in a trench one day when a shell exploded and a fragment struck him violently in the breast pocket. It pierced his paybook and a Testament and then struck a steel mirror which it dented. The piece of shell was deflected and passed out through the side of his pocket.

For his gallantry over the 4th October 1916 and the 5th October 1916, Alec earned a very deserving Military Cross. This was to be his first decoration of the war.

The Citizen reported the action on the 2nd December 1916:

...The gallant officer...is Alec Lewis the popular Gloucester and County footballer and assistant master at Tredworth Road Council School and son of Mr S. Lewis Overton Dean's Way. Enlisting at the outbreak of the war with his two younger brothers - both of whom fell in action in the early operations in the Somme offensive - 2nd Lieut Lewis served in the ranks of the local Territorial Battalion in France for over twelve months. It was while on active service that he was nominated for a commission, and he obtained his training at the officers' centre out there, being finally attached to the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Whilst in the ranks he was twice wounded though not seriously. Since his connection with the Berks, Lieut. Lewis has taken part in some of the most

desperate fighting, and his decoration was gained in the battle for one of the enemy's most strongly-fortified positions on the Somme.

Alec's esteem in the Gloucestershire community was evident before the war and now amplified by his actions during the battle for Schwaben Redoubt. Perhaps most fascinatingly, a personal account of the event written by Alec in a letter to his old school The Crypt School, was published in their old boys newspaper The Cryptians' 1914-1915:

Dec 1916

News has just come to hand that Sec. Lieut. Alec H Lewis Royal Berks has been awarded the Military Cross. The circumstances under which the distinction was won have not yet been made public, but the following extract from a private letter to the Hon Secretary may throw some light on the question:- 'The worst part of the whole business was holding of the redoubt after it was taken - incessant shelling all day and night, bomb attacks, exposure to wet and cold, semi starvation.....many old and experienced soldiers said it was the worst time they had been through. We were in the line rather a long time, but managed to hang on to every inch we had taken. The task that fell to my lot was to hold a block 40yds from the Huns - no enviable task I can assure you. Naturally we had to be on the 'qui- vive' the whole time and it was precious little rest or sleep we were able to get.'

On being relieved Lewis was sent to a seaside rest camp to recuperate and completed his course of recuperation at an officers' school of instruction where he has finished off by winning the first prize in a boxing competition!

The following commissions and promotions have been gazetted since July last (1916)

Corporal A H T. Lewis to be Temp. Sec. Lieut Royal Berks

Alec's tenacity and humility are both equally displayed in his account of the circumstances that led to his awarding of the Military Cross. Only a stone's throw away from the enemy, the desperation that Alec and the battalion bombers fought with is palpable. The sheer exhaustion that the men suffered from being in a protracted state of alertness must have taken its toll on Alec and he was given a rest.

The Citizen reported too:

...Lieut Lewis has been given a well-earned and necessary rest.

It is an amazing feat that even when resting, Alec managed to win a boxing competition such was his fitness. The down time must have given Alec room to think over the events of the past few months. Losing two of his brothers as well as countless friends in his battalions, Alec must have seen red throwing bombs at Schwaben Redoubt. There is no doubt that this fury sustained him in part throughout this attack. Alec may have felt that the investiture of his Military Cross was somewhat vindication for the deaths of his brothers.

On the 7th November 1916 Alec was presented with his Military Cross in the field by General Sir Frederick Ivor Maxse, the commander of the 18th Division. The 18th Division was widely regarded as the best in the British Army and Maxse's unique and effective training methods proved effective throughout 1916. It was therefore a great honour for Alec to have such a great man pin a medal on his breast. The War Diary:

Billets, WARLOY, wet, ceremonial parade cancelled owing to wet weather. Maj General FI MAXSE presented medals in the CAFE DES VOYAGEURS. 2/LT AHT LEWIS MC A/CSM R RUFFELL DCM 10 military medals.

Acting Company Sergeant Major Ruffell had won his distinguished conduct medal in a fine manner during this action. The London Gazette 25th November 1916 recorded this citation:

For conspicuous gallantry in action. Her supervised the working of the company under heavy fire, displaying great courage and determination. He has previously done fine work

Alec was mentioned in the Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser 13th December 1916:

Bravery In The Field:

Military Cross for Hampshire Regimental Officers.

A supplement to "The London Gazette," issued on Monday night, contained a list of awards by the King in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty in the field. Amongst those included in the list were:-

Military Cross

...Second-Lieutenant A.H.T. Lewis, R. Berks.

The Western Gazette 15th December 1916 also mentioned the awarding of his Military Cross:

Bravery In The Field:

Military Cross for Hampshire Regimental Officers.

A supplement to "The London Gazette," issued on Monday night, contained a list of awards by the King in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty in the field. Amongst those included in the list were:-

Military Cross

...Second-Lieutenant A.H.T. Lewis, R. Berks.

The Reading Mercury 16th December 1916 wrote this of Alec:

Royal Berks Honours:

It was announced on Tuesday that Temporary Second Lieutenant A.H.T. Lewis had been awarded the Military Cross, under the following circumstances:-

"For conspicuous gallantry in action. He assumed command of a company of another unit, reorganised bombing sections, and successfully dealt with the enemy at a critical time. He set a splendid example."

Perhaps most proudly, the Gloucester Journal 16th December 1916 published a photograph of Alec and exalted him in this extensive piece:

Military Cross for Gloucester Officers:

Distinction for 2nd Lieut. Alec Lewis:

Popular Gloucester Footballer.

Among the officers awarded the Military Cross, is Temp Sec.-Lieut. A. H. T. Lewis, Royal Berkshire Regiment. The official report states the decoration was awarded "for conspicuous gallantry in action. He assumed command of a company of another unit, reorganised bombing sections, and successfully dealt with the enemy at a critical time. He set a splendid example."

The gallant officer referred to is Alec Lewis, the popular Gloucester and County footballer, and assistant master at Tredworth-road Council School, and son of Mrs S. Lewis, Overton, Dean's Way. Enlisting at the outbreak of the war with his two younger brothers- both of whom fell in action in the early operations in the Somme offensive- 2nd Lieut. Lewis served in the ranks of the local Territorial Battalion in France for over twelve months. It was while on active service that he was nominated for a commission, and he obtained his training at the officers' centre out there, being finally attached to the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Whilst in the rank he was twice wounded though not seriously. Since his connection with the Berks, Lieut. Lewis has taken part in some of the most desperate fighting, and his decoration was gained in the battle for one of the enemy's most strongly fortified positions on the Somme.

Lieut. Lewis is the second Gloucester footballer to gain distinction- Corporal W. Washbourne was awarded the Military Medal a few weeks ago- and his numerous friends in football, rowing, teaching, and other circles with heartily congratulate him on the honour conferred on him. We understand Lieut. Lewis has been given a well-earned and necessary rest.

This latest distinction recalls the splendid part the members of the 1913-14 Gloucester football team is playing in the great world struggle. With one or two exceptions the whole fifteen joined the ranks at the outbreak of war, and the honours and casualty lists bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the men have nobly done their duty in the sterner work they have been called upon to perform. The casualty list is a length one, especially amongst the forwards. The popular captain (G. Holford) was badly wounded in the early part of the struggle, and on recovery was discharged from the Army. Sergt. S. Millard, Lce-Corpl. S. Sysum, and Sergt. A. Saunders have made the great sacrifice, and Lieut. Frank Ayliffe, Lieut. J.F. Lawson, Lce-Corpl. S. Smart, Corpl. W. Parham, Pte. F. Webb, Pte. Albert Cook, and Pte. W. Dovey have all been wounded. Pte. C. Cook too, has suffered physically though escaping damage from shot and shell, and has spent several months in hospital. Lce-Dorpl. Lionel Hamblin has gone through the strenuous campaign, so far as we know, without any serious mishap, and continued good luck to him will be the earnest wish of all City football enthusiasts...

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 23rd December 1916 stated:

Lieut. Alec Lewis's Distinction:

The Chairman called attention to the fact that Second-Lieutenant Alec. H.T. Lewis, of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, who had been an assistant master at Tredworth Council School, has been awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action. He thought that was a very satisfactory and gratifying announcement (hear, hear). Mr Waddy said he thought he should be acting in accordance with the wishes of the Committee in giving Lieut. Lewis's school a half-holiday in honour of his distinction, and this had been done (hear, hear). Mr Conway Jones said he presumed that a record of Lieut. Lewis's distinction would appear on the minutes, and an affirmative reply was received.

The Tredworth Council School at which Alec worked as an assistant-schoolmaster, received a half-day holiday due to his gallantry. Alec had become somewhat of a celebrity and his deeds of heroism had disseminated through the Gloucester community.

On the 27th November 1916, Alec's tranquil seaside holiday came to an end as the 6th Berkshire Regiment War Diary noted:

Bn marched to final destination leaving at 9.15AM and arriving at LE TITRE at 12.15pm. Billets fairly good. 2/Lt AHT Lewis rejoined.

However, Alec had come back to his battalion with the temporary rank of captain. This was a huge promotion of Alec who had only just received his commission. As a captain, Alec would be handed command of a company consisting of 200 men.

The Cryptians' 1914-1918 recorded:

Summer term 1917

The following promotions have taken place his term.

To be Capts. 2nd Lieut A H K Lewis M.C.

For the next month until the 28th December 1916, the battalion was involved in rest and company training exercises.

The Gloucestershire Echo 23rd December 1916 reports Alec as fighting a Red Cross charity boxing match back in England:

Boxing Day Football:

Match at Gloucester:

On Boxing Day teams representing Gloucester and Cinderford will meet at Kingsholm in friendly rivalry, the proceeds of the match going to the local Red Cross funds. Teams: - Gloucester- Lieut L. Vears, back:...Lieut Alec Lewis...

On the 29th December 1916 the War Diary records:

Moved by route march to DRUCAT

Drucat was a small village rear of the line with a Church of St Martin and a small cathedral. There they rested until the 1st January 1917 when they marched to Gezaincourt.

The Citizen summarised the contribution that the 1913-1914 Gloucester Football Club's First XV had made to the war in a short article on the 14th December 1916:

The reference [in a previous edition] to the distinction bestowed on Second Lieut. Alec Lewis for conspicuous gallantry in action recalls the splendid part the members of the 1913-14 Gloucester football team is playing in the great world struggles. With one or two exceptions the whole fifteen joined the ranks at the outbreak of war, and honours and casualty lists bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the men have nobly done their duty in the sterner work they have been called upon to perform. Alec Lewis joins Corporal W. Washbourne in the honours' list - the latter was recently awarded the Military Medal. The casualty list, we regret to say is a lengthy one, especially among the forwards. The popular captain (G. Holford) was badly wounded in the early part of the struggle and on recovery was discharged from the Army. Sgt. S. Millard, Lce-Corpl. S. Sysum and Segt. A. Saunders have made the great sacrifice and Lieut. Frank Ayliffe, Corpl. W. Parham, Pte. F. Webb, Pte Albert Cook and Pte W. Dovey have all been wounded. Pte C. Cook too, has suffered physically though escaping damage from shot and shell and spent several months in hospital. Lce-Corpl. Lionel Hamblin

has gone through the strenuous campaign, so far as we know without any serious mishap and continued good luck to him will be the earnest wish of all City football enthusiasts.

The battalion rested at Gezaincourt until marching to Bernaville on the 11th January 1917. After staying for several days, the 6th Berkshire Regiment marched to Puchevillers on the 14th January 1917.

On the 15th January 1917 the War Diary recorded:

Route march to MARTINSART (GLOSTER HUTS - AVELUY Rd)

On the 27th January 1917 the War Diary placed the battalion as marching out to relieve the 1st Bedfordshire Regiment in the front line:

Moved by route march to WARWICK HUTS - arrive 12.30PM. 4PM - Relieved 1st Bedfords in subsector between SIXTEEN Rd incl to STUMP Rd (R16c5.5 to R15c5.3) A on right - B on left - C in support, D in reserve. Relief complete 7.45PM. Casualties - B Coy 2 killed 13 wounded - shell landed bang in the dug out entrance during relief. Quiet night - no patrols sent out.

The next day on the 28th January 1917 patrols were sent out to probe the German lines at Desire Trench. Alec would have led one of these as the War Diary stated:

Holding DESIRE line - opposite GRANDCOURT. Quiet day - patrols sent out to No Mans land at night. No casualties.

The War Diary for 30th January 1917 reads the same:

Holding DESIRE line - Quiet day. D relieved B and C relieved A - relief complete 7.15PM. Patrols out at night.

Apart from shelling, the battalion had not suffered severe casualties holding the front line in January 1917 as the War Diary 31st January 1917 recorded:

Holding DESIRE line - Quiet day - About 400 shells put round Bn HQ no casualties. Patrols out at night. Post established on STUMP Rd at R15c6.4 200 yards in advance of old position. Statement of Casualties 1st January 1917 to 31st January 1917. OR 8 killed 15 wounded.

The 1st February 1917 was noted by the War Diary:

Holding DESIRE line opposite GRANDCOURT. Quiet day. Patrols sent out into No-man's land during night. No casualties.

On the 2nd February 1917 the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment was relieved by the 10th Essex Regiment at night as the War Diary recorded:

Holding DESIRE line. Quiet day. Relieved by 10th Essex at night. Relief commenced 5-30PM completed 9-5PM, good relief - no shelling. Bn moved back to WARWICK HUTS on NAB Rd in Bde support to Left - Bn.

The battalion held this position in Warwick Huts until moving to Wellington Huts on the 9th February 1917.

The War Diary for the 10th February 1917:

Bn find working parties for Railway – 4 Coys

On the 11th February 1917, the War Diary records the battalion moving into billets:

9AM - Bn moved by route march to VARENNES arriving at 12-30PM. Accommodated in billets.

Although the men had been given brief respite, this was not to last for long. The 6th Berkshire Regiment was being pushed for an attack imminently. As a company commander, Alec's role in the training of his men leading up to this attack was instrumental. Having already earned the admiration and respect of his men in combat on previous occasions, Alec had to maintain this tradition in the next big action.

The War Diary for the 12th February 1917 until the 13th February 1917:

Company training. Practice forming up for the attack.

This was followed by training at night on the 14th February 1917:

Company training. Practice forming up for the attack by night.

The War Diary for the 15th February 1917 begins to pick up the pace:

9AM - Bn moved to tents near Wellington Huts by route march and halted for dinners. 3.40PM - Bn moved up by Companies into the front line and took over the battle front from the junction of 16 Road and GRANDCOURT TR exclusive (held by HUNS) along GRANDCOURT TR to GRANDCOURT VILLAGE from 7th RW Kents. A Coy held portion of GRANDCOURT TR facing N with 3 platoons and 1 platoon & HQ in FOLLY TR. D Coy held GRANDCOURT Rd and village from junction of GRANDCOURT TR & Rd to the orchards with 2 platoons. Quiet relief completed by 11.50PM.

It was one of Alec's roles to ensure that this relief was performed as quietly as possible so as not to alert the enemy to the presence of fresh troops in the line. This could jeopardise the attack.

Another one of Alec's roles was as a reconnaissance officer for the 53rd Brigade, a position in which he would serve with great distinction in the year to come. Captain Rochfort the 6th Battalion Berkshire Regiment adjutant wrote:

The long frost which lasted from November 1916 to February 1917 broke on the morning of the 16th February. The tape line laid out for this attack was actually nailed into the ground, and so hard was it to drive the nails in, that it took us five hours to lay it. Major Hoare was the Brigade Major who accompanied us on this little exploit and while we were laying the line we wondered how it would be possible to dig in in any way until the frost broke.

*The troops usually termed this the 'Grocery Battle' as the trenches we were attacking were Tea, Coffee and Rum trenches. Coffee Trench was a mystery trench. It came out in aeroplane photos, was strongly wired, but no movement was ever seen in it. **On the morning of the 6th Lewis and I approached Coffee Trench from the orchard above Grandcourt. We found that Coffee Trench was only a trace, 6 inches deep, but that the wire in front of it had not been cut. General Higginson got our artillery on to this all day and succeeded in having the whole of it destroyed.***

The good work of Captain Rochfort and Alec managed to save the battalion being held up in attack by dense barbed wire. On the 16th February 1917 the War Diary records the preparations for the attack:

Mn (0hrs) - Preparations for attack on 17th commenced. 1.30AM - Tape line laid out from a point in 16 Rd 30 yds N of its junction with FOLLY TR on a bearing of 288 M. for a distance of 570*. This line was divided into three equal parts and allotted to Coys in accordance with attached plan "B". Orders issued to Coys and final details determined see "C". 9.45 - Orders for march to forming up line issued under APA/4. 10.0 - Our heavies turned on to the German strong point at junction of 16 Rd and GRANDCOURT TR. Line immediately WEST of this point evacuated by withdrawing to the WEST. 11.45 - Orders issued to OC A Coy for evacuation of GRANDCOURT TR 1 1/2 hrs before Zero. During the period 7AM to 11.45AM the orchards at NE corner of GRANDCOURT were reconnoitred and found to be clear of the enemy. **The line in front of COFFEE TR where it meets the GRANDCOURT MIRAUMONT RD was also reported to be a serious obstacle and not cut. Bde issued orders for STOKES guns to be turned on to this and Artillery were also informed.** 12 NOON - Orders issued to D Coy to find a post to hold the orchards. [REMARKS - "see APA/7"] 5.50PM - Hour of zero received and issued to Coys. Time 5.45AM 17th. [REMARKS - "see APA/12] 6.10 - Orders issued to A Coy to have posts on 16 Rd & GRANDCOURT Rd to prevent troops marching beyond the tape line. [REMARKS - "see APA/13] The day of the 16th was fine but a thaw had set in and the going was very heavy. The atmosphere was rather misty and visibility was poor. Our Artillery spent the day cutting wire in front of COFFEE TR. The GERMAN Artillery shelled Bn HQ in the GUNPITS throughout the day and blew in one entrance to the dug out. The night was very dark and no stars could be seen. It was extremely difficult to find ones way owing to the broken state of the ground and the mud. The tape line which ran near Bn HQ was used by all runners after dark as a guide. 7.20PM - **Report that wire in front of COFFEE TR was not properly cut sent in to Bde.***

Alec's competence as a brigade intelligence officer was made mention of again. Being fit and agile, it was easy for Alec to sneak his way up close to enemy lines and extricate himself once his reconnaissance had been performed.

The battle that followed, nicknamed the 'Grocery Battle' due to the names of the German trenches, was to be known as the Battle of Boom Ravine, or the Battle of Miraumont. Here, the British generals wished to attack German positions on the Ancre Heights and obtain a chunk of front line from where they could launch further attacks in 1917. Boom Ravine snaked from Grandcourt towards Courcellette on the high ground. Regina Trench and Desire Trench protected the area, Desire Trench having been occupied previously by Alec and the men of the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment in the winter of 1916. In fact the winter had been so cold that it had ceased fighting over this period. The ground was hard in places and in others the frost had turned to slush. It was hard working digging trenches and even harder work advancing in attack.

The War Diary 17th February 1917 details the the attack:

0.5AM - Rations failed to turn up in spite of guides sent out. This was undoubtedly due to the intense darkness. Coys warned not to delay moving up by waiting for rations.

1.0 - Tape line for Norfolks to form up on continued to our left.

4.50 - OK received from all Coys and reported to Bde. At about midnight the enemy opened a slow barrage on all our lines of approach. The line to the GUNPITS was barraged all night.

At 4AM a slow barrage was opened on our forming up line.

At 5AM this increased in intensity and caused some casualties. In GRANDCOURT VALLEY this barrage was mostly 4.2. And 5.9s and very little of this was shrapnel.

At 5.40AM Bn HQ dug out was blown in and Bn HQ started to move to a dug out at the junction of REGINA TR and 16 Rd.

5.45 - Our barrage opened and attack launched in the dark. The attack progressed in accordance with programme but owing to the darkness troops became somewhat disorganised. Casualties in the actual advance were not very serious. The final objective was reached but owing to the line taken up on the right of the Bn had to be withdrawn to the line shown in Appendix D. Casualties were mostly walking cases.

The following Officers were wounded. Capt VG McARTHUR about 7.30AM. " NB HUDSON " 6.0 " 2Lt A BIRCH " 6.0 " (since died) " AJ FOX " 6.0 " " FJ SMEETON " 6.15 " " SJ KYDD " 6.15 "

The following is a description of events by Companies:

"C" Coy - Right attacking Company. The strong point at junction of GRANDCT Rd and 16 Rd was carried with very little opposition. A platoon of 8th Norfolks was attached to the Coy for mopping up. The Coy was in close touch with the SUFFOLKS on 16 Rd and assisted in the clearing of the road. RUM TRENCH was passed over as it was not held by the enemy. The wire in front of COFFEE TR was not well cut but gaps had been formed and the attack was pressed home to the 1st Objective. A machine gun in COFFEE TR was captured and the team knocked out by the leading wave. Dugouts in the sunken portion of 16 Rd contained many Germans and a fair number of prisoners were taken here in conjunction with the 8th Suffolks. The barrage moved on after a 37 minute halt and the Company having reorganised the attack was pushed home successfully to the final objective the GRANDCT - MIRAUMONT Rd and the bluff in R.10b. At this point it was found that the troops on our right had not been able to push forward as rapidly as we had done and in consequence the flank of the Coy was attacked by Germans coming back from the ground immediately N of BOOM RAVINE. As a consequence the line was withdrawn about 300 to the junction of BOOM RAV & 16 rd and touch with B Coy on the left in Tea TR was obtained and the work of consolidation commenced. A strong point was started at R10b3.2 and while supervising the siting of this strong point Capt VG McARTHUR - the Coy Comdr was wounded. 2Lt A Birch was wounded near COFFEE TR and has since died of wounds. The command of the Coy was taken over by 2Lt GH TIGAR and the work of consolidation completed.*

"B" Coy - Centre attacking Company. The Coy started the attack and crossed the portion of GRANDCT TR which had been held by us and RUM TR without opposition. Some casualties caused by the enemy shrapnel barrage. Capt NB HUDSON who commanded the Company was wounded while moving up to COFFEE TR. The 1st Objective COFFEE TR was captured and the work of reorganising commenced. When the barrage moved on after the 37 minute halt the attack was pushed home to the final objective. 2Lt AJ FOX and 2Lt FJ SMEETON were wounded in the fighting round COFFEE TR and command of the Coy was taken over by A/CSM HINE. The final objective was gained but in order to conform with the withdrawal of C Coy on the right the line was slightly withdrawn to about R10a6.3 & the work of consolidation was continued under the command of 2Lt JMS BATTAMS who had taken command of the Coy.

"D" Coy- left attacking Company No resistance was met by this Coy until the trench immediately E of the orchards was reached. The wire here had not been well cut but offered no serious obstacle. The

trench was lightly held and was captured with no difficulty. 2Lt HGN TARRANT immediately pushed on to the sunken road running GRANDCOURT to P.MIRAUMONT and captured about 70 of the enemy in the dug outs on the S. side of the road. A patrol was pushed on to the line of the railway & the line was consolidated and touch gained with B Coy on the right and a coy of 8th Norfolks on the left. Assistance was received in the capture of the objective from A Coy 8th Norfolks attacking on the left. "A" Coy - Reserve Coy On the assaulting troops moving forward A Coy moved into the line GRANDCOURT TR and when the assaulting troops moved to the final objective after the 37 minute halt of the barrage two platoons moved up and garrisoned COFFEE TR - two platoons to GRANDCOURT TR & headquarters to FOLLY TR. At zero hour Bn HQ moved from the gunpits, which had been very heavily shelled, to a dug out at the junction of REGINA TR and 16 Rd.

8AM - Situation reported to Bde. Line visited and consolidation started. 1050 - Situation reported to all Coys.

CO visited line - consolidation being completed. Remainder of day spent in improving line and burying dead. Day quiet. Casualties 6 Officers wounded - (1 died of wounds) 19 other ranks killed 169 wounded & missing. Quiet night - very little shelling by enemy.

It was likely that Alec was with Battalion Headquarters during this attack as the reconnaissance officer. Battalion Headquarters and many other important British formation points were blown up by accurate and directed German artillery fire; a shell landing in the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment's Headquarters and forcing an evacuation from the area prior to the attack. As Captain Rochfort wrote privately:

The night of the attack was the darkest I have ever known. A thaw had set in, and a mist rose about 8 or 9 feet from the ground. Once in this mist it was impossible to see a yard. We had all roads blocked and guarded and guides out with tape and wire leading up to the forming up place. Some of the - Division had deserted that afternoon into the Boche line and had given away the hour of the attack. As a result we were shelled all night on our forming-up line.

Headquarters was in some gunpits, but so heavy was the shelling that Colonel Clay decided to evacuate them and use a shell hole. As we were leaving the gun pits, a shell burst in the entrance, knocked Col Clay and me into a shell-hole full of water and wiped out the two runners who were carrying our papers, namely Whitehouse [12291 Pte Ernest Whitehouse] and Mabson [12475 Pte George Mabson]. Whitehouse was carrying a leather attache case with the orders and maps for the battle. We never found a trace of him or the attache case.

With the Headquarters in disarray and the battalion runners killed by a single German bombardment, something seemed amiss. As Page 140 of the book *The 18th Division in the Great War* elucidates:

Boom Ravine was won by steadfastness and endurance in the most trying circumstances. It was one of the few proved cases of the war in which there was British treachery: two men of a neighbouring Division went over to the enemy and revealed the hour of the offensive, with the consequence that our attacking infantry were cut up by shell fire as they assembled in the dark, in exposed positions

It has been postulated that disillusioned soldiers of the 17th Royal Fusiliers had given themselves up to the German lines and told them of the upcoming attack, allowing the German bombardment to accurately disrupt the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment whilst it was forming up. However, this was not to daunt the battalion, which took its objectives promptly and had to fall back due to vigorous

German counter-attack and because they had moved too far ahead of the other attacking units. Over 1000 yards in difficult terrain had been won through the battle.

A Sergeant in the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment outlined his experiences in the Berkshire chronicle 24th April 1917:

The attack was launched at 5.45 am and three companies went over with A Coy in support. First of all three trenches which were named Rum, Coffee and Tea, had to be captured and this task was soon accomplished, the enemy putting up but little opposition. But a different story has to be told when it comes to taking the final position, viz the Ravine. Here the Germans were very strongly entrenched. They had machine guns galore and dug-outs that could be counted by the dozen. The fighting was of a very fierce character with plenty of bombing. We ultimately occupied all the dugouts, our bombers doing splendid work. In fact bombing formed the chief part of the fighting. We lost some men through them going beyond the position without clearing the enemy. The fighting was all over by 8.45 am. We consolidated the position and got in readiness to meet a counter attack. This however the enemy did not attempt, although they shelled us very heavily. We had the misfortune to lose all our Company Officers, wounded. Acting Company Sergeant [Hines] received the Military Medal for carrying on after the Company Officers had been wounded, taking over the charge of one of the companies in directing operations in a manner calling for the highest praise. Private G E Court won a similar decoration for carrying messages under heavy fire.

The Brigadier-General H.W. Higginson praised Alec and his men for their role in the Battle of Boom Ravine in his report:

The night of the 17th February was extremely dark and owing to the thaw the ground had become very sticky. The enemy also opened a heavy barrage on our forming up line about 4.0 am and continued it until about 5.15 am. This rendered the operation of forming up extremely difficult. I attribute the successful accomplishment of this task to the high qualities of leadership shown by Lt Colonels HILL and Clay, Capt ASHDOWN (8th Norf. R) and the officers and NCOs of the 3 Bns concerned, namely the 8th Suff R, 6th R Berks R and 8th Norfolk R (1 Coy) and also to the splendid discipline shown by all ranks. Fortunately the heaviest part of the barrage did not fall on the forming up line of the Bde except in the mass of the left of the 6th R Berks R and the 8th Norfolk R, consequently, except in the last named Bn, casualties from this cause were comparatively few.

The units had been ordered to be in position by 4.15 am and to report completion of forming up, but no definite report had been received at Bde HQ by 5.45 am regarding the forming up of the assaulting units.

The 6th R Berks R had had their HQ blown in and all communication cut: several runners had also been knocked out. The Coy 8th Norf R on the left of the R Berks were dependent on the R Berks for communication and were thus also cut off.

He continued:

In the meantime the 6th R Berks R were also advancing on COFFEE Trench. RUM trench was found to be unoccupied but COFFEE trench was found to be fairly strongly held with much uncut wire of the knife rest pattern in front of it.

The attack however was pressed home with great gallantry, parties working through gaps in the wire and getting round the flank of the enemy. A considerable number of prisoners were thus captured. During the assault on COFFEE Trench the casualties amongst the Officers of the right and centre

companies were heavy. Capt N B Hudson was wounded, 2nd Lieut A Birch mortally wounded and 2nd Lieut A J Fox and F J Smeeton wounded. The command of the right Coy then devolved upon A/CSM Hine.

The left Coy of the 6th R Berks R and the Coy of the 8th Norf R had encountered no resistance up to this point and reached their first objective about 6.0 am.

At 8.41 am the 6th R Berks R pushed on to the Final Objective which was reached about 7.0 am. The line then ran approximately from about R.10.b.3.8 along the GRANDCOURT - MIRAUMONT Rd to the Railway about R.10.a.2.6 where touch was established with the 8th Norf R.

Owing to all the officers and NCOs of the right Coy who reached the BLUFF having become casualties I have been unable to ascertain exactly what occurred on this flank. It appears that shortly after the arrival of the right of the right Coy at this point it was found that touch had been lost with the R Fusiliers on the right and the Coy was attacked in flank by the enemy, losing a considerable number of men killed and some prisoners. Capt V G McArthur, who was in command, finding he could not hold on, withdrew the remnants of his Coy to about R.10.b.3.3 where a strong point was established. While doing so Capt McArthur was wounded. This was about 8.0 am. The centre Coy, finding its right exposed, withdrew its right to about R.10.a.6.3. The left Coy met with little resistance and with the Coy of the 8th Norf R on its left pushed on to the final objective which was gained about 7.0 am, about 70 prisoners being captured in the dugouts on the S side of the road. I am of the opinion that the capture of this left part of the objective was greatly assisted by the Stokes Mortar barrage which had been arranged on this area. Six Stokes Mortars under

Lieut J Cromie were placed in position about R.9.d.4.9 during the night 15th/16th Feby. These mortars fired 500 rounds on the enemy trench E of the orchards during the 16th. From zero til plus 19 these guns barraged the enemy trench running N & S from R.10.a.05.35 to R.10.b.07.05. At plus 19 they lifted from R.10.a.07.05 to R.10.a.05.20 till plus 22 when firing ceased.

It was now about 8.0 am and all BOOM RAVINE had practically been cleared by the 8th Suff R in their area. About this time the 8th Suff R observed troops of the 54th Inf Bde on their right coming back over the skyline from the direction of S MIRAUMONT trench: a small party of the 6th R Berks were also seen retiring from the BLUFF. 2 Lewis guns were immediately pushed forward to cover this retirement.

The Brigadier-General was also aware of the possibility of deserters betraying the British positions:

When our barrage opened the enemy reply opened at and was not heavy. From 9.0 am onwards throughout the 17th the hostile artillery fire was directed on certain defined area: BOOM RAVINE, COFFEE and GRANDCOURT trenches. It was not however sufficiently intense to interfere with the work of consolidation. At 4.30 pm the enemy shelling of the valley and bank in R.10.d was very intense and counter-battery was asked for.

The attitude of the enemy infantry was not aggressive: a considerable amount of sniping and machine gun fire took place but nothing was attempted by him in the way of a counter attack.

In conclusion the Brigadier-General wrote:

a) The absolute necessity of a forming up line was proved on this occasion. Had it not been for the tape it would have been impossible to have formed up correctly. When no roads or defined tracks

exist, the route to be taken by companies from their rendezvous to their position of assembly must be marked.

b) Our barrage was very good. Owing however to the darkness and mud the majority of the men in the assaulting wave were unable to keep close to it.

c) Most officers were at first of opinion that zero hour was too early. It was quite dark at 5.45 am and this caused some confusion and loss of direction. After further discussion however, they have come to the conclusion that the darkness saved many casualties from MG fire as the troops were moving down the exposed northern slopes from GRANDCOURT trench into the ANCRE valley. I consider that no fixed rule can be laid down as regards hour of Zero. every case must be considered separately. Facilities for forming up, formation and condition of the ground, distance of objectives etc. all affect the point in question. There are however certain principles which can be formulated.

Zero hour should be just before the first streak of daybreak in the following cases:-

(i) When the forming up line is under view of the enemy and no cover is available.

(ii) When troops have to advance a long distance down a forward slope to reach their final objectives.

(iii) When attacking a re-entrant.

(d) The necessity of ensuring that wire in front of enemy objectives is out is of vital importance. It is courting failure to attack trenches unless the wire is cut and even if the attack succeeds, it is generally at the expense of heavy casualties. Wire cutting must be finished 2 days before the attack. Wire cutting on the day previous to the attack causes retaliation from the enemy at a time when troops are moving up to their battle positions.

(e) Battle HQ of Bde and Bns should not be in positions the approach to which can be observed by the enemy, The battle HQ of the 6th R Berks R was not specially shelled until two days before the attack. The enemy evidently observed the movement of orderlies etc, to and from the position of the dug out and knowing its exact location, was able to bring accurate fire on to it. In this particular case there was a covered way to the dug out but it evidently was not used by everyone approaching it.

The attack was successful and the battalion was given a rest. The 18th February 1917 was comparatively quiet as the men consolidated their gains:

Work on new line continued. Dumps formed in all posts. Quiet day. Orders for relief by 10th Essex received 4PM.

Relieved on the 19th February 1917, the battalion moved to the rear:

1AM - Relief by 10th Essex commenced. 6.15 - Relief by 10th Essex complete. Bn moved to billets in MARLBORO HUTS - NAB Rd.

Until the 6th March 1917, the battalion War Diary lists the men as resting and performing salvage work behind the lines. On the 6th March 1917, the War Diary describes the battalion heading back into the line:

Bn relieved 8th Norfolks in SUPPORT in Boom RAVINE. Relief started at 5PM completed 11PM.

Until the 9th March 1917, the battalion was detailed salvage work in Boom Ravine. On the 10th March 1917 "A" Company was tasked as a carrier unit for a 53rd Brigade attack:

Bde attacked and captured IRLES and GREVILLERS TR. Very successful operation. A Coy carrying for the two attacking Battalions and formed dumps in the Quarry at N of IRLES ORCHARDS and at the pt where GREVILLERS TR cut the GREVILLERS - IRLES Road. Carrying completed by 1PM. Casualties 2 killed.

On the 11th March 1917, the 6th Berkshire Regiment moved into the town of Irles which had been recently taken in heavy fighting. As the War Diary stated:

MN - Bn moved off to relieve 10th Essex and 8th Norfolks holding IRLES and the posts round it. Relief completed by 3.30AM. 1 Coy 8th Suffolks attached to Bn as a Reserve in RESURRECTION TRENCH. Line was held by Coys in accordance with attached maps. Relief was carried out without interference from the enemy. Quiet morning. Line held and defences improved during day light. Casualties from enemy shell fire in village of IRLES at about 9AM. 4OR. Village shelled intermittently through out the day - also RESURRECTION TRENCH. 12 NOON - Arrangements made with OC A Coy to reconnoitre gun pits at G26b3.1 and also for posts to be pushed out to cover the 8th R Sussex Pioneers at work on the night of 11th. 3PM - Observer of RFC reported ACHIET LINE not held. ADA Arranged for patrols to verify this after work completed. 5PM - OC 8th R Sussex Pioneers called and definitely arranged to dig new trench - posts to be in position by 9PM. 9PM - Posts in position and trench started & dug to depth of about 4ft by 4AM.

The next day on the 12th March 1917, the battalion withdrew and were relieved as the War Diary continues:

4AM - Posts withdrawn to original line - patrols report ACHIET LINE held. Quiet morning - some rain - going very heavy. 2PM - Line on NE side of IRLES heavily shelled. Casualties 2 killed 3 wounded. Information for relief received from Bde and orders issued. Arrangements made for OC B Coy to push post to G26c6.8. 3PM - Orders issued for new trench to be held by weak posts. 9PM - Night very dark. All guides moved off to line. 11.30PM - Relief commenced.

From here, the battalion bathed and trained behind the lines. They marched to Warloy on the 20th March 1917, and again to Pierregot on the 22nd March 1917. On the 23rd March 1917, the battalion moved by buses to Clairly Saulchoix a small village 8 kilometres west of Amiens. Here, they trained until the 25th March 1917 when they marched to Bacouel and boarded a train northbound. The battalion detrained on the 26th March 1917 at Berguette and marched to billets at Lambres on the same day.

At Lambres the men rested and trained. On the 31st March 1917 the War Diary interestingly makes note of the testing of gas masks:

Bn training. Box respirators tested in lachrmatory gas chamber. STATEMENT OF CASUALTIES. MARCH 1917. KILLED - Other Ranks 10 WOUNDED - " 21 MISSING - " 1 believed wounded

The 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment and the 53rd Brigade were placed in reserve for the 3rd Battle of the Scarpe on the 3rd-4th May 1917. The War Diary for the 3rd May 1917:

3.45AM - British attacked. 11.0 - Moved forward to sunken road W of COVEUL river between HENINEL & WANCOURT. 4.0PM - Moved forward through heavy German barrage to trenches in N30b

& c . Casualties in moving through barrage 15 killed 23 wounded 2 missing. Bn HQ at N30b5.2. Bn now in close support to 55th Bde whose attack had failed and had withdrawn to old British front line. Quiet night.

The War Diary for the 4th May 1917:

Quiet day. 9PM - Bn relieved the 55th Bde in front line from O25d5.1 to O25b9.4. Line taken over by A on right D on left B right support C left support Coys. Bn HQ in gunpits at N30b5.2. SUFFOLKS on our right. 14th Division on our left.

From this point, the 6th May 1917 the War Diary records:

Quiet day. Inter company relief carried out at dusk - started at 8PM completed by 9.15PM. Patrols sent out report all quiet. 9.30PM - Line extended to right to CABLE TR inclusive.

The battalion held the frontline until the 9th May 1917 when they withdrew to the Rookery Trenches from Cherisy. On the 10th May 1917, the battalion moved to the frontline again:

Quiet day. 10pm - Relieved the 11th Lincolns & 12th Northumberland Fus in front line. Line held as follows D Coy PUG LANE & BROWN TR to N36d01. A Coy BROWN TR to ROTTEN ROW (incl) B Coy (reserve) CONCRETE TR C Coy (counter attack HINDENBURG Support Line at T6a38. Bn HQrs at T5b3.7. Bn now on right of Bde front NORFOLKS on left 33rd Division on right.

On the 12th May 1917, Alec was sent out on a night patrol to the enemy lines. Although quiet, this job was especially fraught with danger due to the possibility of night counter-attacks and the pervasive darkness. The War Diary of the 12th May 1917 records:

Quiet day. 2/Lt AHT LEWIS patrolled enemy front at night and reported it as normally held.

Relieved of their frontline duties on the 14th May 1917, the 6th Royal Berkshires moved back from the line and rested, although it is noted that they were ever-ready for the threat of gas attack in the area.

On the 18th May 1917, Alec and the battalion went into the front line again as the War Diary stated:

Quiet day. 5PM - relieved 10th Essex in right sub sector of Bde front. Line held as follows C Coy PUG LANE & right of BROWN TR. B Coy remainder of BROWN TR A Coy CONCRETE TR D Coy Hindenburg support line. 7PM - Relief complete. NORFOLKS on our left 33rd Divn on our right. Quiet night.

On the 19th May 1917 a rumour was heard purporting that the enemy had withdrawn. This was later shown to be incorrect as the War Diary stated:

Quiet day, rumours of enemy withdrawal found to be incorrect

On the 21st May 1917, the battalion was relieved and spent time at the rear again:

Quiet day. 10pm - relief by 7th Buffs commenced. Bn withdrew to Divl reserve area between BOISLEUX au Mont & BOYELLES

From the 22nd May 1917 until the 2nd July 1917, Alec and his men spent time resting and training in musketry and field drills.

On the 3rd July 1917, the battalion moved as the War Diary noted:

Rest billets - training. 4.20pm - March to MONDICOURT and entrained to CASSEL. Joined II Corps V Army.

Cassel was a Flemish commune in Nord, northern France that existed since Roman times. During the Great War it was the headquarters of Marshal Ferdinand Foch and the British Second Army commanded by Sir Herbert Plumer. Alec would have seen a town that was remarkably untouched by the war thus far. Sir Herbert Plumer was an excellent tactician and Alec was in good hands under his care.

Alec and the battalion marched to their billets at Steenvorde on the 4th July 1917. At Steenvorde, Alec began training his company once more. On the 9th July 1917 they were reinforced as the War Diary stated:

Coy training. Draft of 87 OR from 46 IBD

It was clear that there was an attack imminent.

On the 27th July 1917, the men marched to Reningelst, a rest camp in Belgian West-Flanders. The men then marched to another rest camp on the canal at Ouderdom on the 29th July 1917.

The War Diary for the 6th Berkshire Regiment on the 30th July 1917 read:

Bn equipping for action on 31st. Marched at 9pm to forward area ZILLEBEKE

The stage was set for the Third Battle of Ypres. Aiming to disrupt the German 4th Army's train and supply lines, the Battle of Passchendaele was one of the bloodiest actions of the war fought in the worst conditions seen. The 18th Division were to participate in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge; the opening attack of the Third Battle of Ypres. The Battle of Pilckem Ridge attempted to take control of the Gheluvelt Plateau, a high point on the terrain. The 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment was attached to the 30th Division for the attack. The plan was for the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment to leapfrog the Manchester Regiment after they had taken Glencourse Wood.

The War Diary records the attack:

All references to Sheet ZILLEBEKE 1/20,000. A copy of all operation orders & messages received & sent is attached.

1.55AM - Head of Bn arrived in assembly area in I.17d and I.23a & c. 3.5 - Bn reported present in assembly area. Message sent to Bde HQ to this effect.

3.50 - Zero hour.

5AM Bde report Blue line captured.

5.50 - Patrols under 2/Lts HR Hooper and GH Tigar sent forward to get in touch with 17th Manchesters

6.50AM. Black line reported captured unofficially.

7.15 - Bn moved from assembly area in Artillery formation towards forming up line.

8.30 - Bn passing through SANCTUARY WOOD in I.13c. Fairly heavy MG fire & artillery barrage directed against Bn. No Manchester met up to this point and captured trenches did not appear to be garrisoned.

8.45 - JACKDAW RES TR reached. Owing to MG fire from YPRES-MENIN Rd and SURBITON VILLAS Bn deployed to extended order. Advance resumed and the line of the YPRES-MENIN road made good.

9AM - Attack on the black line determined on and commenced by rushes under cover of rifle & MG fire. Suffolks and their attd TM co-operated with fire on SP at J14a3.21/2.

9.50 - In spite of strong opposition and without assistance from our own Artillery which was unaware of the situation the line Xrds J7d91 JARGON SWITCH and SURBITON VILLAS captured. Touch gained with Lincolns at bank in J7d.

10.10 - British barrage opened behind the line of resistance holding up the Bn. Efforts to advance were stopped by rifle & MG fire from the JARGON TR LINE.

10.30 - Consolidation of the line J7d9.4 - Xrds J7d9.1 - JARGON SWITCH - J13b9.6 - junction rds at J13b9.5 - E of SURBITON VILLA where touch was gained with the SUFFOLKS. The work of consolidation was difficult owing to hostile MG fire & aeroplanes dropping bombs on troops consolidating.

3pm - Enemy seen massing for counter attack in GLENCORSE WOOD. SOS barrage called for - Artillery open fire and attack did not materialize. Remainder of day fairly quiet but enemy kept up continuous shell fire on consolidated troops & Bn HQ on YPRES MENIN Rd in the tunnel at J13b3.1.

8.30pm - Orders for relief by 17th KLR received. Details arranged direct with Bn - Relief orders attached. 12MN - Relief commenced. Completed 2.50AM Aug 1st. Bn withdrew to DICKEBUSCH. Narrative of operations & copies of messages attached. Detail of casualties attached.

STATEMENT OF CASUALTIES JULY 17

OFFICERS Capt AH HUDSON killed Lieut HS TINDALL killed 2/Lt HGN TARRANT MC killed 2/Lt HR HOOPER wounded " WD REES wounded " EHG WORDEN wounded " WH WOOD wounded " AA BARRETT wounded

OTHER RANKS killed 35 Died of wounds 6 Wounded & Missing 1 Wounded 177 Missing 27 TOTAL 246

In the confusion of battle, the 30th Division with the 17th Manchester Regiment had taken Chateau Wood instead of Glencourse Wood. As mentioned above, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment found the wood heavily defended and unmolested despite being informed that there would be no resistance. Instead, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment found itself in the midst of an immense cacophony of machine gun fire, accurate rifle fire, artillery barrages, counter-attacks and aerial bombardment. Once news of the error reached headquarters, it was decided that all resources be diverted to the taking of Glencourse Wood. Luckily, accurate 18th Divisional artillery fire dispersed any attempted counter-attack on the area. Although not mentioned in the War Diary, Alec was wounded in this action. Alec would have been treated by Captain Harold Ackroyd Royal Army Medical Corp, the battalion medical officer of the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment, who that day won a Victoria Cross for his actions in the front line.

Captain Nicholls in the 18th Divison history records:

... in all that hellish turmoil, there had been one quiet figure, most heroic, most wonderful of all. Dr Ackroyd, the 6th Berks Medical Officer, a stooping, grey haired, bespectacled man rose to the supreme heights that day. He seemed to be everywhere; he tended and bandaged scores of men for to him fell the rush of cases around Clapham Junction and towards Hooge. But no wounded man was treated hurriedly or unskilfully. Ackroyd worked as stoically as if he were in the quiet of an operating theatre. Complete absorption in his work was probably his secret. When it was all over there were 23 separate recommendations of his name for the Victoria Cross.

His citation for the Victoria Cross:

For most conspicuous bravery. During recent operations Capt. Ackroyd displayed the greatest gallantry and devotion to duty. Utterly regardless of danger, he worked continuously for many hours up and down and in front of the line tending the wounded and saving the lives of officers and men. In so doing he had to move across the open under heavy machine-gun, rifle and shell fire. He carried a wounded officer to a place of safety under very heavy fire. On another occasion he went some way in front of our advanced line and brought in a wounded man under continuous sniping and machine-gun fire. His heroism was the means of saving many lives, and provided a magnificent example of courage, cheerfulness, and determination to the fighting men in whose midst he was carrying out his splendid work. This gallant officer has since been killed in action

Indeed Alec may not have survived the day had it not have been for Captain Ackroyd winning his Victoria Cross.

Although Alec was taken away from the front line, it did not take him long to return. On the 8th September 1917 he was attached to the 53rd Brigade Headquarters as the Brigade Intelligence Officer. He rejoined his unit at Roubrouck who were billeted and resting after severe fighting in his absence.

On the 23rd September 1917, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment moved to Poperinge by train and marched to a camp as the War Diary explains:

2pm - Bn moved by tactical train to POPERINGE and marched to ROAD CAMP VAN TER BIEZEN arriving at 2AM 24th.

The next day they were given a lecture by the corps commander and on the 9th October 1917, they moved via bus to a canal bank. The battalion was being moved to the front for the Battle of Poelcappelle. This was an attack designed to push the German army to the brink of destruction in one fell swoop.

On the 10th October 1917, the War Diary records:

Bn moved to CANE TRENCH and HURST PARK

On the 11th October 1917 the battalion War Diary Read:

In support. Day spent in preparing for operations 2/LT GF AUGSTIN killed

On the 12th October 1917 the attack began. Things did not go well as the War Diary explains:

1am - Leading Platoon left CANE TR for final forming up position. Considerably shelled with gas and HE from STEENBEEK Valley forward.

4.45am - Leading Platoon reached first forming up position (V25a40.95)

5.30am - Whole battalion formed up on line V25b0.3 - V19c5.0 with HQ V25a40.95.

5.25am - Zero Hour.

6.10am - No news received from troops in front - Battalion moved forward to second forming up position. Heavily engaged by enemy MGs and snipers from BREWERY, MEUNIER HOUSE & BEEK HOUSES.

6.30am - Lt COL LONGHURST killed. CAPTAIN ROCHFORD MC assumes command.

6.35am - CAPT ROCHFORD went forward to reconnoitre and is wounded. LIEUT WERNHAM assumes command.

6.50am - Battalion unable to make further progress but no definite news could be obtained. Considerable officer casualties.

12.30pm - A,B & C Companies rather disorganised on a line V26a9.6 - V20a0.1. D Company V26a5.8. HQ V25a40.95. In touch on right with 9th Divn & on left with the Buffs.

1pm - Verbal warning of counter attack on left front but this never materialised.

7pm - OC 7th RI West Surreys arrived at Bn HQ with orders for withdrawal. Runners sent to Companies but unable to find them.

The War Diary for the 13th October 1917 continues:

5.30am - Orders issued for companies to withdraw to CANE TR after the Queens had formed a line of posts behind them.

8am - A Company reported relief complete - other companies reported that daylight withdrawal too costly.

9am - 4.30pm - troops withdrawn in ones and twos. Whole Battalion clear of the line by 4.30pm. Troops proceeded to CANE TR for hot tea etc and were then ordered to proceed to MURAT CAMP.

8.30pm - All troops under cover at MURAT CAMP and report sent to Brigade HQ to this effect. Lt Col. LIDDELL took over command.

The beginning of the attack was smooth until the battalion reached the Steenbeek River. Here the men closed up ranks to maintain touch and direction. The marsh reduced manoeuvrability considerably and constant harassment by enemy gas and shells created problems for the men advancing. As the going was so slow, the final company of the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment only reached the forming-up area 20 minutes before zero hour. At zero hour there had been no news from the troops in front and it was becoming clear that the attack in front of the battalion had failed. About 200 yards from their assault point, the leading companies came under intense heavy machine

gun, sniper and rifle fire from the Brewery, Meunier House and Beek House. Casualties beginning to mount, Brigade Intelligence Officer Captain Alec Lewis moved forwards under the rain of bullets to assess the situation. He was joined by Captain Rochfort whom he had previously performed reconnaissance missions with before. Rochfort was badly wounded at this time and Alec continued to feed back intelligence to battalion headquarters. At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Longhurst the Commanding Officer of the battalion had been killed, plunging the unit into disarray. With Rochfort wounded, Lieutenant Wernham was the only officer at battalion headquarters and he took command. Alec meanwhile, was reconnoitring the front line and feeding back information to Brigade Headquarters. He went forwards under the fire from the Brewery, Meunier and Beek Houses, ascertained the failure of the 7th Queens Own Royal West Surrey Regiment and their eventual capitulation. Alec sent this information to brigade headquarters, which effected the withdrawal of his 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment. Due to the disarray and disorganisation of the day, the battalion had to be withdrawn in ones and twos under fire.

The Berkshire Chronicle 7th December 1917 recorded the bloody action:

A battalion of the Royal Berks Regiment has been heavily engaged during the past few months and news of a desperate encounter with the Boche on the 12th October is to hand. The story of what took place was supplied to our representative by a member of the battalion. The objective was gained but unfortunately at some loss. There is some consolation however in knowing that the wounded were in greater preponderance than those who lost their lives, but the battalion had to mourn the loss of their gallant colonel [Lt Col HGF Longhurst] who was killed by a shell just before the attack was launched. He was at what is known as Pheasant Farm and was at the time standing by the side of a tank. The colonel who succeeded Colonel Clay [Lt Col B G Clay], who has been made a brigadier-general, was beloved by all who served under him and his death cast quite a gloom over the battalion. He had been with the battalion since 1914 and rose to the position of CO from the rank of Lieutenant. Another officer to make the great sacrifice was Lieutenant W R Wachter who was killed just before the objective was reached and the adjutant was wounded in the arm, which had to be amputated at the Essex Farm Station at a similar stage of the fighting.

The advance was made at 7 o'clock in the morning and within a couple of hours we had accomplished our task. The Boche did not put down a very heavy barrage at the start but as we went on we were exposed to a scythe of shells and bullets and by the time we reached our objective the intensity of the enemy's fire had increased to a marked degree. Still for all that the battalion (all four companies were in it) swept over the ground in a manner calling for the highest praise, and when one considers we covered a thousand yards in so short a time our performance must be written down as a very fine one. Having got to a given point we consolidated our position and other battalions came through to continue the advance.

The ground was fairly level but it was very difficult to negotiate being studded with shell holes. There was no trench warfare. What we had to take were strong concrete positions known as pillboxes and to capture these is no easy matter. It meant much in desperate fighting before they fell into our hands but we were greatly helped by our splendid artillery. Altogether about twenty of these were taken and my platoon bagged a couple. The machine guns inside were of no use, they had been put out of action. On the side of the road was a large brewery. In this the Huns had a large concentration of machine guns, which were causing a great deal of damage and a heap of snipers. In time the machine guns were silenced and rushing the place the building was captured and the Germans left alive were taken prisoners. The Germans seemed to have plenty of snipers all over the place. These men are always difficult to locate but when once discovered they pay the penalty. All the same they accounted for a large number of our men. Other casualties were chiefly caused through mustard gas shells, which were used very freely against us and the Boches' enfilading fire. We simply had to fight

our way through by dodging the fire and I might say that we lost a good number before the attack was actually launched owing to the intensity of the Germans shelling although as I have already said it was not so fierce when we started on our errand. There was not a lot of bombing but I should like to pay a tribute to our stretcher-bearers who performed magnificent work under heavy shellfire. They rescued many a wounded man who, without aid, could never possibly have got back. The German losses were heavy. One officer of ours - a second Lieutenant - who fell was a member of the National Sporting Club He was killed about half way through the fight. We also lost several sergeants and other NCOs.

Sir Douglas Haig wrote this:

Highly successful minor operations were carried out by our troops this morning on the battlefield in the neighbourhood of Poelcapelle and in conjunction with the French south of Houlthuis Forest.

East of Poelcapelle battalions of the Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Berks Regiments and Northumberland Fusiliers attacked on a front of about one and a half miles and captured a number of strongly fortified buildings and concrete redoubts on the hill east of the village.

Rain had again fallen during the night rendering the ground slippery and the task of assembly difficult. In spite of this the whole of our objectives were captured after fierce fighting in which many Germans were killed.

Our troops southeast of Poelcappelle then pressed on and carried other valuable positions beyond the line of their objectives.

The attack had proved a success but came at a very high cost. Lieutenant Colonel Liddell who took over command of the 6th Berkshire Regiment due to Captain Rochfort's wounding, and General Higginson subsequently wrote to Rochfort in his infirmary bed:

The 12th was a very unfortunate day for the Brigade. Neither your Battalion nor the Suffolk ever had a chance. It was cruel luck, two such splendid Battalions being wasted

The battalion had stood up excellently despite the trying circumstances and the odds stacked against them. From the heavily defended positions to the marshy terrain, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment did not stand a chance that day. They lost 7 officers with 8 wounded, and 33 other ranks with 155 wounded.

Not only did the battalion perform well as a whole, Alec emerged as a hero on the day. Announced in the London Gazette 14th December 1917 and again in the London Gazette for the 19th April 1918, Alec was awarded the Bar to his Military Cross:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in carrying out the duties of brigade intelligence officer. During some reconnaissances, made under heavy shell and rifle fire, he gained most valuable information regarding the ground and our dispositions. On one occasion he made a reconnaissance along the front line in close proximity to the enemy and under fire from their snipers

The citation truly reflects the difficulty of the day and the horrendous conditions that Alec was working in.

The Cryptians' 1914-1918 stated:

Captain A.H.T. Lewis M.C. has been given a bar

The Reading Mercury 22nd December 1917:

Royal Berks Honours:

Bar to Military Cross:

Temp. Capt. A.H.T. Lewis, M.C. (M.C. gazetted December 11th 1916).

The Gloucester Journal 22nd December 1917 exalted Alec:

War Honours:

A list of war honours gazetted on Monday night included the following:-

Bar to Military Cross.

Temp. Capt. A.H.T. Lewis, M.C., Royal Berks Regiment (M.C. gazetted Dec, 11th, 1916). Capt. Alec Lewis is the well-known Gloucester and County Rugby footballer.

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 5th January 1918 recorded gleefully about one of its favourite sons:

Capt. Alec Lewis's Distinction:

The Deputy-Mayor said it was his pleasing duty to refer to the fact that Captain Alec Lewis, of the Tredworth Boys' School, who had previously been awarded the Military Cross, had now received a bar to it. That was a very great honour, and one upon which they all would wish to congratulate Capt. Lewis (hear, hear).

The Reading Mercury 27th April 1918:

How Honours Were Won:

The following are descriptions of how honours in the Royal Berks Regiment (as announced in the "London Gazette" of December 17th) were won:-

BAR TO MC

Temp. Capt. A.H.T. Lewis, M.C.- For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in carrying out the duties of brigade intelligence officer. During some reconnaissance, made under heavy shell and rifle fire, he gained most valuable information regarding the ground and our dispositions. On one occasion he made a reconnaissance along the front line in close proximity to the enemy and under fire from their snipers

The Gloucester Journal 27th April 1918:

Stories of Gallant Deeds:

Bar to Military Cross:

T./Capt. A.H.T. Lewis, M.C., R. Berks. Regt.- For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in carrying out the duties of brigade intelligence officer. During some reconnaissance, made under heavy shell and rifle fire, he gained most valuable information regarding the ground and our dispositions. On one occasion he made a reconnaissance along the front line in close proximity to

the enemy and under fire from their snipers. [Capt. Alec Lewis is the well-known Gloucester and county footballer, and former assistant master at Tredworth Council School].

The Cryptians' 1914-1918 also recorded:

July 1918

Bar to M.C.

T/Capt A H T Lewis MC R. Berks.R for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in carrying out the duties of brigade intelligence officer. During some reconnaissances made under heavy shell and rifle fire, he gained most valuable information regarding the ground and our dispositions. On one occasion he made a reconnaissance along the front line in close proximity to the enemy and under fire from their snipers.

After the Battle of Poelcapelle, the battalion moved to the rear for rest until the 30th October 1917 when they were moved to Plumstead Camp in Belgium.

The battalion War Diary of the 31st October 1917 gives a summary:

Company training.

STATEMENT OF CASUALTIES OCTOBER 1917

OFFICERS Lt Col HGF LONGHURST killed 12.10.17 2/Lt GF Austin " 11.10.17 " GH Tigar " 13.10.17 " CH Todd " 12.10.17 " ATH Tunbridge " 12.10.17 Lieut WR Wachter " 12.10.17 Lieut JW Jeakes

Died of Wounds 12.10.17 Capt RA Rochfort MC wounded 12.10.17 Capt ECJ Spencer " " Capt GC Hollis " " 2/Lt W Angel " " " FC Morgan " "

OTHER RANKS Killed 33 Wounded 155 Missing 10 Offrs OR TOTAL 12 198

The battalion had been depleted severely from the fighting and crucially had lost a lot of its officers.

From here the battalion was placed in reserve over the New Year. Alec took leave of one month from the 16th January 1918 to the 16th February 1918 when he travelled back to England. On the 22nd February 1918 he was recorded as still with the 18th Division Headquarters, but on the 28th February 1918 he was posted to the 2/4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment. This was because on the 12th February 1918, the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment had been disbanded. Alec would have felt bittersweet about this, leaving memories of Ypres behind but losing the sentimentality of his old unit.

The 2/4th Berkshire Regiment was part of the 61st Division, 184th Brigade and at the time that Alec joined them as their Intelligence Officer, they were training in Ugny L'Equipee in northern France, 63 kilometres east of Amiens. The battalion War Diary has them in good spirits:

The Battalion continued training from 8.30am to 1pm. In the afternoon a Demonstration Platoon from "B" Company made a practice raid before the whole Battalion illustrating methods of cutting enemy wire, assembling in NO MAN'S LAND, entering and leaving enemy trenches, forming bomb stops, etc and the general organisation of a raid. At 6pm a concert was held in the recreation hut.

The War Diary for the 1st March 1918 noted:

The Battalion continued training according to programme from 8.30am to 1pm, and was again visited by the Brigadier-General commanding 184th Infantry Brigade. The Int Officer toured the

BATTLE POSITIONS in SUB-SECTOR B of the BATTLE ZONE of the 61st Divisional Sector, preparatory to the Battalion taking over in that Zone.

It seemed imminent that Alec again would be thrust into the front line. The war diary for the 4th March 1918:

At 7.30am Battalion Operation Order No 153 was issued ordering the Battalion to move forward today and relieve the 2/5th BATTALION, THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT in the BATTLE ZONE. The Divisional Sector is now held as follows:- The Sector extends from half a mile north of GRICOURT southwards to the line opposite the northern extremity of ST QUENTIN. This sector is divided into three parts:- The Northern held by the 183 Brigade The Centre held by the 184 Brigade The Southern held by the 182 Brigade Brigades which are now composed of 3 Battalions are disposed in depth, one Battalion holding the OUTPOST LINE and LINE OF RESISTANCE in the FORWARD ZONE, the second battalion is billeted in the BATTLE ZONE, having entrenched fighting positions in course of construction. The Third Battalion is billeted in the REAR ZONE. Reliefs at present take place every 8 days, Battalions moving forward, the one in the FORWARD ZONE returning to the REAR ZONE. The day was cold, windy and snowy, making marching very trying. The troops on reaching their billets, which are wooden huts on the Western edge of ST QUENTIN WOOD, had tea and deposited their kits, and then proceeded by Companies to man the Battle positions, when all ranks knew their stations and the routes to them the Battalion returned to billets. A Table of Work for the ensuing day was issued.

It was ironic that Alec should be taking over the old lines of his 5th Gloucester Regiment. No doubt this would have conjured many memories of his brothers and comrades from 1914-1916.

It must also be noted that as Intelligence Officer, Alec may well have been the one writing the war diary entries from here on.

On the 3rd March 1918 the battalion worked on emplacements for their attack:

All Companies paraded at 7.45am and were taken by Sapper guides to work on the Battle Zone positions.

The War Diary states that this continued the next day on the 4th March 1918:

Between 4.0 and 5.0am enemy registered on our new work in "A" Coy Battle Positions. During the day work was continued by all Companies on the Battle Zone positions work lasting from 8am until 1pm.

Alec as the Intelligence Officer would have sat down with the Commanding Officer and listened to a lecture on the battle ahead on the 5th March 1918:

Work on positions continued as on previous days. Weather bright and clear, and consequently greater aerial activity over the wood. The Commanding Officer lectured all Officers and NCO's on "The Defence Scheme of the BATTLE ZONE".

On the 6th March 1918 there was another lecture:

The Battalion was engaged as before from 8am to 1pm on the BATTLE positions. The Commanding Officer lectured all Officers and NCO's on "The Defence of the Forward Zone". Battalion Orders for Defence when in Sub-Section "B", BATTLE ZONE, were issued

On the 7th March 1918 more work was performed on the defensive position according to the War Diary:

Routine as on previous days. Work on the defences 8am to 1pm. 1 hours training in the afternoon. Battalion Defence Scheme "B" Sector was issued.

On the 8th March 1918, a trial run of battle stations was run to prepare the men as recorded by the War Diary:

At 3.47am the order "TEST MAN BATTLE STATIONS" was received by the Battalion from Brigade. Companies proceeded independently and all posts were in position by 4.58am. Work from 8am to 1pm was carried out on the ZONE DEFENCES

Alec was called upon the next day to visit the front line and conduct reconnaissance of the enemy:

The Commanding Officer and Intelligence Officer visited the Forward Zone - Sector B of the Divisional Front to reconnoitre the positions. *The Battalion carried out the usual programme of work on the Defences. Operation No 154 with Administrative instructions were issued for the Battalion to relieve the 2/5 BN GLOSTER REGIMENT in B Sector of the Forward Zone on the night of 10th/11th. Battalion Orders Were issued.*

As the battalion prepared to move to the front, Alec was at his station near the enemy positions. The War Diary for the 10th March 1918:

The Battalion spent the day preparing for the relief. The Commanding Officer, Intelligence Officer and all Company Commanders, went to their various sectors during the morning. *Companies moved independently, leaving billets at 7pm (Summer Time). Soon after the relief was complete the Commanding Officer and Second in Command visited all Companies, returning to Bn HQ at 4am. Bn HQ is situated in CHATEAU QUARRY in ENGHIEU REDOUBT, which is garrisoned by "D" Company. The Front line extends from South of GRICOURT to just North of FAYET, and is held by "A" Company on the left and "B" Company on the right in line of Resistance, each Company finding posts in an Outpost Line in front. "C" Company to the rear detailed for Counter Attack has 2 Platoons and HQ behind "A" Company and 2 Platoons behind "B" Company.*

The 11th March 1918 saw the battalion engaged in short, sharp intelligence gathering raids. Alec would have been a part of these not only bringing back information first hand, but synthesising it to relay to his superiors:

The day was bright and sunny. Very little activity on either side, chiefly confined to Artillery. 2/Lt H G CHAMPION took out an observation party to a ridge half way across NO MAN'S LAND. Much information was gained as to areas of enemy activity, and one working party was fired on by the Artillery on receipt of information from the party observing. Shooting was accurate, but the party of enemy had already moved. Orders were issued during the day for regular wire patrols to be out all night, the orders to come into effect on the night of 11/12th and continue for the rest of the tour. Two Patrols were sent out at night to certain parts of the enemy wire and brought back information as to its condition. The Patrols also located the position of Two Enemy Machine Guns.

Valuable information was gained on this day. Reconnaissance was also conducted by aeroplanes and reports given to Alec to co-ordinate with more raids. The 12th March 1918 saw this action:

Another bright day with excellent visibility. Our artillery showed increased activity. Aeroplane Photographs taken a day or two previously showed suspicious objects about 2 miles behind the enemy line on our sector. A Shoot by our Artillery was carried out during the afternoon. One small fire was started and 4 ammunitions dumps observed to explode. Orders for Three Fighting Patrols to go out on the night 12th/13th and 1 observation patrol to go out on the 13th were issued. The Three night patrols did not encounter any enemy parties, but brought back information on:- Routes and Direction Marks across NO MAN'S LAND. State of the ground between the lines, and also Position of Enemy Machine Gun and Posts.

On the 13th March 1918, further intelligence was gathered as well as the appearance of a strange, red, German balloon:

The weather continued bright and sunny with a light breeze from the NE. The Companies during the day were engaged on improving the posts in their Trenches. 2/Lt G CHAMPION again spent the day in NO MAN'S LAND observing the enemy lines. He was connected by telephone direct with Bn HQ who were in telephonic communication with an 18 Pounder Battery. Shortly before 11am parties were observed working on the enemy trenches, noticeably one large party of about 50 men. 15 rounds were promptly fired but struck about 200 yards to the North of the large enemy party, however, one smaller party were driven to ground. After a short interval to allow the enemy to resume work, further gun-fire was directed on the corrected target, and all parties at once scattered in disorder. No further movement except of isolated individuals took place in that sector for the rest of the day. 2/Lt CHAMPION remained out till dusk and returned to our lines. He reported that an enemy aeroplane came over his position and, dropping to within 50 feet of the ground, thoroughly searched the vicinity, but gave no signs of having noticed the presence of the observers. Enemy activity was slight. Our forward trenches and the road east of Bn HQ were shelled lightly during the day. At 2.20pm a German Red Paper Balloon of some 5 feet in diameter landed near Bn HQ. No messages or matter of any kind were attached. Our artillery again showed increased activity, constant shoots of various calibre's being directed against enemy targets during the day and night. During the night 12th/13th we sent out Three Fighting Patrols. One went to within 200 yards of the enemy wire to observe the effect of an artillery shoot with the intention of entering the enemy trenches if wire was sufficiently damaged. On patrolling the wire however it was found to be intact, and very strong, all shells having passed over on to the enemy trenches. The other two patrols went out to fight any enemy patrols encountered, and to reconnoitre routes across NO MAN'S LAND, state of enemy wire, possible points of entry and positions of enemy posts and machine guns, the information which is required for a proposed raid. One patrol returned with information as to enemy wire and state of the ground. The second discovered the position of a weak place in the enemy wire, and also one of his posts and machine guns. Unfortunately the post opened rapid fire on to the patrol resulting in the following casualties:- WOUNDED 2/Lt J C MULLIN 203011 Lance Cpl BROWN 38902 Pte W SUTCLIFF MISSING 20002311 Pte W J BINNS The patrols on this and the previous nights took out with them certain propaganda which they fastened to the enemy wire. This will be repeated each night during the tour in the line. Orders for these Night Patrols had been issued early in the day.

On the 14th March 1918, further night fighting was conducted as well as improvements to the defensive trenches. It seemed that neither side was prepared to launch a massive attack, so trench raids were frequent:

The day was fine, but the morning and early afternoon were hazy, hampering observation. Orders for three night fighting patrols in addition to the nightly wire patrols were issued. Enemy activity was slight, but FAYET was shelled during the evening. Our artillery carried out various shoots all day and night. The Low Flying Enemy Aeroplane which has been active on our front of late, again visited FAYET in the early morning and dropped his usual white flare. The Companies were engaged during

the day on improving their posts and trenches. Positions were chosen and partially marked out and prepared for Two Companies of a "Counter Attack Battalion" according to the Defence Scheme of the Sector

On the 15th March 1918, much the same activity occurred as recounted by the War Diary:

During the day the entrenched defences of ENGHUEN REDOUBT were improved. Very little activity on either side. Fighting Patrols were not sent out but a reconnaissance was made of a route across "NO MAN'S LAND" for a proposed Raid. The usual all night patrolling of our wire was carried out.

Alec's role as Intelligence Officer was once more called upon as the 2/4th Berkshire Regiment looked to make a raid:

During the day our forward positions were occasionally shelled, otherwise nothing of importance occurred. Preparations were made for a Raid on the Enemy Trenches and the starting point and the route reconnoitred. The weather continued fine.

On the 17th March 1918 the attack was carried out:

Final preparations for the raid were made. After dusk the route was prepared with tapes. A preliminary 3 minute bombardment of the "point of entry" and surrounding trenches took place at 9pm. The Raiding Party under Captain KNOTT successfully entered the enemy trenches but found the part of the system enclosed by our BOX BARRAGE to have been cleared and no identifications could be secured. The Enemy's retaliatory Artillery and MG Fire was heavy and accurate on our forward and support trenches.

The Germans poured enfilade fire onto the British trenches as they attempted to gain intelligence for Alec as the Battalion Intelligence Officer. The 2/4th Royal Berkshire Regiment under Captain Knott attempted a second raid but were beaten back as the War Diary mentioned:

The Raid carried out last night was repeated in the hope of obtaining identifications. As soon as our Barrage commenced, however, the enemy replied intensely and the flanks of the point of entry were strongly manned with rifles and machine guns resulting in our raiding party being beaten off without effecting an entry

With that raid unsuccessful, the battalion was relieved and sent to the rear again at Ugny as the War Diary noted:

The Battalion was relieved early in the morning by the 2/4th BN OXFORD and BUCKS LT INF and marched to MARTEVILLE and thence to UGNY, reaching the latter place at about 8am. The remainder of the day was spent in Resting and cleaning.

The next day Alec took the adjutant and the company commanders to the front and reconnoitred the position between Spooner Redoubt and Holnon Wood. The War Diary for the 20th March 1918 records:

The ADJUTANT - INTELLIGENCE OFFICER and one Officer per Company spent the day in reconnoitring the ground of the Battle Zone Sector and the ground between SPOONER REDOUBT and HOLNON WOOD, being one of the positions to which the Battalion be required to move in the event of an attack. Light Training was carried out by the Battalion.

The reason for the British preparations was the impending threat of Operation Michael, the German Kaiserschlacht or Spring Offensive of 1918. The last ditch effort for Germany to win the war began on the 21st March 1918 with a massive attack as the 2/4th Royal Berkshire Regiment War Diary recorded:

Order to "MAN BATTLE STATIONS" was received at 5am. Battalion moved off at 6.30 arriving at MARTEVILLE at 8.30am, thence to RAILWAY CUTTING between VERMAND and ATTILLY.

At 3pm "B" and "C" Companies counter-attacked enemy in front of ELLIS REDOUBT. "D" Company were in Support with Battn HQ at ELLIS REDOUBT, and "A" Coy were withdrawn to RAILWAY CUTTING.

The enemy was encountered in overwhelming numbers, and the parties were compelled to withdraw under very heavy MG fire to RAILWAY CUTTING.

Lt Col J H S DIMMER VC, MC was killed, and 2/Lieuts H G CHAMPION, E L H SHELFORD, W L HAILE and WH SMITH were wounded, and heavy casualties sustained by the rank and file. Capt and Adjutant J S DARBY assumed command of the Battalion

Alec's brave commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Dimmer who had been awarded the Victoria Cross previously, died commanding his unit on horseback. Alec seemed to have escaped the day unscathed, but he knew that this was only the beginning of what would be one of the worst periods in British military history.

The 22nd March 1918 brought a second, huge attack as the War Diary continues:

The morning was very misty. At 10.30am the enemy put down a heavy barrage, which was followed by infantry attacks in great force. "B" and "C" Coys moved up to a position between ELLIS REDOUBT and VILLECHOLES. These positions were held and very heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy, until the order was received to withdraw to the line in front of BEAUVOIS at 12.30pm. This manoeuvre was carried out in good order and without loss. During the fighting Capt E K NOTT was killed, Capt G HINCHLIFFE and 2/Lieuts G W de St LEGIER MC and J LAWRENCE were missing, and Lieuts H F F COGGIN and K P SMITH and 2/Lieuts W A COZENS and J TULLETT wounded.

Throwing themselves at Alec and the British soldiers once more, the Germans attacked on the 23rd March 1918:

The Battalion reorganised on the CORPS LINE in front of BEAUVOIS, and were distributed in depth. About 5.30pm the enemy made a determined onslaught with overwhelming forces, the greater weight of the attack being delivered on the Right. Our Right Flank being in the air, we were compelled to withdraw 600 yards. The trenches were only 18 inches deep, and at 6.30pm a terrific barrage was put down on this line, lasting 10 minutes. About 7pm Battalion reorganised and held out until 12 midnight, when order was received from 183 BRIGADE to march to VOYENNES, from whence march was continued to LANGUEVOISIN, where battalion rested for the night.

The 24th March 1918 gave the 2/4th Berkshire Regiment a brief intermission from the fighting:

Capt G O W WILLINK MC assumed command of the Battalion. Battalion rested for the day. Nothing of interest happened

The 25th March 1918 however, saw heavy machine gun and rifle fire concentrated on the British front line. The enemy managed to trap the front line in a flanking manoeuvre which Alec reported on as Battalion Intelligence Officer; the battalion was subsequently withdrawn:

At 11am the Battalion moved out to take up a defensive position at the Bridgehead where the VOYENNES Road crosses the CANEL, and eventually formed a line on the RAILWAY and dug in. There was intense MG and rifle fire at 11pm, but no infantry attack ensued. The morning passed without incident. Our snipers found plenty of targets, and a number of the enemy were hit. The enemy worked round our flanks, and the position becoming untenable, a withdrawal was ordered at 6pm. A delaying action was fought, and the Battalion withdrew with slight losses to the QUARRY behind BREUIL, eventually digging in on a line between CRESSY and BEHTANCOURT. During this day's fighting Capt G L WORLOCK MC and 2/Lieut J W BARBER were wounded.

The battalion withdrew thankfully with no casualties, to the capital of the Ardennes region, Mezieres. They reached the town on the 26th March 1918 and began frantically preparing defensive positions:

At 1am orders were received to withdraw to ROYE, which was reached without loss about 5am, where rations were issued and Units reorganised. About 7.30am the Battalion resumed the march with other elements of the Division, reaching FRESNOT about midday, where dinners were served, after which the march was continued to MEZIERS and work at once started on the defence of the Village

Alec and the battalion pushed forwards the next day, where Alec reconnoitred the defensive positions and made adjustments:

At 1am orders were received to push forward to LE QUESNIL, where Battalion found billets and officers reconnoitred the defensive positions, which were occupied at midday and improved

Thus began the First Battle of Arras, once more Alec entering the fray:

About 2am Battalion embussed, debussing at MARCELCAVE about 3.30am. At midday orders were received for the Battalion to participate in a counter-attack upon LAMOTTE-EN-SANTERRE. The 183 BRIGADE were to take the Village, the 184 BRIGADE passing through them and clearing two Woods NW of the Village, and the 182 BRIGADE pressing on further and consolidating on the high ground. GLOSTERS were on the Right, OXFORDS in the Centre, and R BERKS on the Left. There was no Artillery barrage, very little cover and the ground was swept with MG fire. Consequently progress could not be made beyond a certain point, and a withdrawal was ordered about 5pm. Meanwhile 2/Lieut A WHITFIELD MC with 20 men and a party of 1/9th ROYAL SCOTS reached the SW fringe of the Village, and being entirely isolated, hung on till dusk, when they effected a withdrawal. The Battalion reformed and took up a defensive position in front of MARCHELCAVE, with the right on the RAILWAY and the Left linking up with a Composite Battalion. Extent of frontage was about 300 yards. In this day's fighting Capt G O W WILLINK MC and CAPT and Adjutant J S DARBY were killed, and Lieuts A CARTER and JA BRAIN and 2/Lieuts E W BIDDISCOMBE and HUDSON were wounded. The losses in the ranks were heavy, but a high proportion wounded

The battalion suffered severe casualties losing many junior officers on this day. Alec and the 184th Brigade were to clear through woods with very little cover and were forced to withdraw back to the village of Lamotte en Santerre. On the 29th March 1918, the action lightened a little as the War Diary states:

2/Lieut A WHITFIELD MC assumed command. The position was heavily bombarded during the morning and afternoon, but the casualties were light. The enemy were apparently using their new light low mounted field gun, most of the shells from this gun being blind and ricocheting. Enemy Patrols and Posts were driven out by our fire and action, and our snipers were very busy. Corpl POVEY fired 150 rounds with his rifle, obtaining many hits, before he was killed by a hostile sniper. The night was fairly quiet with the exception of MG fire.

The War Diary of the 30th March 1918 praises the conduct of Alec and his men:

The enemy fire was normal and in comparison the day was uneventful, with the usual MG fire. The troops on our Right retired, but were rallied and eventually re-occupied approximately their original line. The conduct of our men during the whole of this trying period was exemplary, they held their ground and maintained high spirits under very trying conditions, and annoyed the enemy to the fullest possible extent. Sergts SLARK and RICHMOND and Corpl CLAYTON especially distinguished themselves.

Australian infantry relieved the battalion the next day, depleted and tired from the massive German attacks of the previous days. Luckily for them, a hot meal was waiting for them at the rear as the War Diary of the 31st March 1918 stated:

At 5am the Battalion was relieved by a Battalion of AUSTRALIAN Infantry, and marched to CACHY WOOD, where a hot meal was served. The march was resumed to GENTELLES, where the Battalion was billeted.

Until the 10th April 1918 the battalion remained at Mericourt, receiving a draft of 3 officers and 547 other ranks on the 7th April 1918 to bolster its ranks.

On the 10th April 1918 the battalion marched to Saisseval where they were billeted. The next day, they boarded the train at St Roch station in Amiens for an overnight journey.

The 12th April 1918 saw the battalion detrain at Berguette and set up a defensive perimeter as the War Diary recalls:

Battalion detrained at BERGUETTE at 2am and marched to ST VENANT, where billets were found and breakfasts issued. At 8am orders were issued for Battalion to take up a defensive line in front of ROBECQ, and Battalion marched out at once, having to proceed across country owing to a blazing ammunition dump. Line was taken up and consolidated. Battalion HQ was established at P.23.c.8.3., but were shelled out and removed to P.17.c.0.5. At 5.40pm 5 EA flew low over our lines and one of our planes was crashed. The day was uneventful. At 7pm orders were issued for Battalion to change its disposition, but these were cancelled at a later hour

Enemy aircraft were particularly active on the 17th April 1918:

Enemy Aircraft were active in the early morning, 6 or 7 Planes patrolling our front line and flying over the Supports and Back Areas. At 8.30pm an Inter Coy Relief was carried out, "D" Coy, taking over parts of the Support Line from "A" and "B" Coys, which moved back to Billets at the ASILE D' ALIENNES at P.9. Central. During the day 4 other ranks were wounded.

The next day on the 18th April 1918, Alec was witness to his 5th Gloucester Regiment in heavy enemy action as the War Diary describes:

At 1am Enemy opened a heavy artillery bombardment, shelling the Front Line, village of LES AMUSOIRES, and Back Areas, which lasted until 2am, opening up again at 3am and lasting until 4.30am. At 5am "A" and "B" Coys came up from Billets at the ASILE D'ALIENES and reoccupied their old positions in Support and "C" Coy who were under the orders of OC 2/5th GLOSTERS, moved up to Support the 2/5th GLOSTERS, eventually getting into position at P.19.a.3.7. Enemy Artillery fire was very heavy during the day and the night and we sustained casualties in the Ranks of 6 killed and 32 wounded. The enemy attacked in the region of BAQUEROLLES FARM but was repulsed by the 2/5th GLOSTERS who inflicted heavy casualties and captured 17 prisoners.

All was quiet until the 22nd April 1918 when heavy artillery counter-battery fire filled the sky:

At 4am the Artillery on both sides were extremely active on the RIGHT of our Divisional Boundary, fire approximating to drum-fire continuing until 4.45am. No attack materialised and remainder of the day passed without incident. Work was carried on during, the night under RE Supervision, also wiring of our Left Coy, Advanced Posts and improvement of Trenches. "A" and "C" Coys, relieved "B" and "D" Coys, respectively at 9pm. "B" and "D" Coys taking over Billets at the ASYLUM.

The following day on the 23rd April 1918, the 5th Gloucestershire Regiment attacked again, this time with the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers. They were successful in taking many German prisoners and machine guns as the War Diary alludes:

At 4.30am the 2/5th GLOUCESTERS attacked in conjunction with 2nd LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS on their Right, the enemy positions between BAQUEROLLES FARM and LA PIERRE AU BEURE under cover of a protecting and creeping barrage. The attack was entirely successful, all objectives being gained, together with 5 Machine Guns and over 100 Prisoners. The new line was consolidated and from about 4pm, onwards was subjected to very heavy hostile shelling. At 10pm our COYS in Support Line were relieved by 2/8th WORCESTERS and 2/4th OXFORD and BUCKS LI and withdrew to Billets at P.21.d and P.22.c. which they took over from 4th SEAFORTHHS. During the day we sustained casualties in the ranks of 2 killed and 5 wounded.

After this, the 2/4th Berkshire Regiment was relieved and sent to the rear. On the 30th April 1918 another German red balloon floated over the line with no consequence at Pont L'Epinette.

The battalion relieved the 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment in the front line on the 6th May 1918:

As in previous day. Commencing at 9pm the Battalion relieved the 2/5th BN THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT in the front line, relief being completed without incident at 12.3am 7.5.18

From the 26th May 1918 to the 2nd June 1918 several well-written extracts of day-to-day life appear in the unit War Diary. Alec would probably have been the author of these:

26th May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Again fine and warm. Our Artillery were active during the day and night carrying out the usual harassing fire on roads and tracks. 18pdrs were specially busy at 3.30pm, 4.30pm and 6pm on Q.14.b and Q.14.a. Enemy Artillery inactive, there being practically no shelling on the forward area. Back Areas received a little attention during the night. Our planes were very active continually crossing the enemy line singly and in patrols of 5 or 6. Enemy planes patrolled our lines twice during the morning and three or four times during the evening. One Balloon was up from 5.30pm to 6pm. Patrols were sent out from both front line Companies during the night and located enemy Machine Guns and new works. Wiring and revetting was carried on energetically and successfully during the night.

27th May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Our Artillery was normal during the day, and carried out the usual harassing fire at night. Enemy artillery was very active day and night, and back areas received considerable attention from 11.45pm to 12.15am of the 28th, our forward area was heavily bombarded with 77's, not much damage being done to Post, but the shooting on our tracks was very accurate. A few Gas Shells fell in the vicinity of AMUSOIRES LINE and P.17.d. Enemy MG activity was above normal and roads, tracks and parapets of posts being intermittently swept. Our Planes were busy, but few enemy machines were seen. 10 OB's were up between 10.30am and 11.15am and 8 were pulled down about 3m. At 6pm 2/Lieut C E RANDALL was killed by a Sniper. Our Snipers were busy during the day and claimed three hits. 2/Lieut C S KEMBLE and 2/Lieut A C L HILL and 2 OR's were killed, and 6 OR's wounded by shell fire.

28th May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Fine and good visibility. Seven Balloons were up at 5am. At 7.40am one EA was brought down by one of our machines on our right and fell in the enemy's lines. Our Artillery quiet during the day. Active during the night, especially between 12 mid-night and 12.30am. Enemy Artillery much above normal. ST VENANT and ROBECQ received considerable attention. Between 7 and 8pm over 100 77's fell in P.18.a and c., a number of them being Gas Shells. Gas Shells were again used on this area about mid-night. Direct hits were obtained on Company Headquarters AMUSOIRES LINE and TRIPPS FARM. At 6.50pm 18 Enemy Balloons were up. Casualties to OR's during the period were 2 killed and 3 wounded.

29th May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Again fine and warm with perfect visibility. Our artillery active during the afternoon and night. Enemy artillery maintained increased activity and shelled the whole of the forward area intermittently during the day and night. ROBECQ was shelled at intervals all day. One shell at 7.15pm setting fire to a farm at P.24.c.2.3. Our Planes were active and always heavily engaged by AA Guns. Between 3 and 3.45pm 5 enemy planes crossed our lines but were driven back by AA and MG fire. At 8.15pm an enemy machine destroyed one of our OB's NE of ST VENANT. 10 Enemy OB's were up at 12 noon. Commencing at 10pm an inter-company relief was carried out without incident. Relief being completed by 1am on the 30th. 2 OR were wounded during the day.

30th May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Bright and warm with good visibility. Our artillery was less active than usual. SOS Tests were fired at 10.15pm, 10.55pm and 11.38pm the Test appeared to be satisfactory. Enemy Artillery were active during the day. Between 10.30 and 11pm a very heavy barrage of 77's and 4.2's HE and Gas Shells was put down on front, support and reserve, and the enemy raided our Post No F 32., 7 of our men were Missing and a German stick bomb left in the trench. The wire in front of the Post had been cut out and trampled down. No indication of anything unusual happening was noticed or reported by adjacent posts. Our planes were active during the day. At 5pm one of our machines brought down an enemy OB. Enemy Planes were also active. 5 flew over our lines about 9.40pm and dropped bombs near TRIPPS FARM. They were heavily attacked, engaged by AA Guns, MG Fire and our planes but got away. 5 low flying planes crossed our lines at 11.45am and 3 at 5.15pm. 13 OB's were up during the day. Patrols were sent out by each forward Company and located Enemy posts and working parties. Casualties to OR's during the period were 2 killed and 6 wounded.

31st May 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Again bright and very warm. Our artillery active during day and night. SOS Tests were carried out at 1.15am, 1.55am and 2.38am. Enemy artillery was quiet in the forward areas during the day. Heavies paid the usual attention to ST VENANT and ROBECQ, a dump being fired in the former. Short heavy shoots were carried out on the Reserve Line, tracks and roads. TRIPPS FARM and neighbourhood of Bn HQ at 10.30pm, 11pm and 11.30pm, 2am and 3.50am. Aircraft on both sides were active all day and continually crossed the lines. Several air fights were observed but none were decisive. Casualties to OR's were 1 killed and 2 wounded.

1st June 1918

FRONT LINE LEFT SUB SECTION. Artillery less active than usual. SOS Tests carried out at 10.30pm 10.50pm and 11.30pm by 306 and 307 and 282 Army Field Artillery Bds. Much aerial activity at 5.50am, 2 enemy planes flying very low over our lines were engaged and brought down by our Lewis Guns. One fell within enemy lines and the other close to our post S22. The two airman, both wounded, were captured. Both were NCO's. The machine was dismantled and machine guns and important instruments removed by RAF party at night.

On the 2nd June 1918, the battalion was relieved and moved back to La Perriere in the rear.

Alec was temporarily attached to the 4th Army as their intelligence officer on the 19th July 1918. It appears that the stress of war had caught up with him as he contracted influenza on the 1st August 1918 and was evacuated by the 38th Field Ambulance. On the 18th October 1918 he was granted leave to England via Boulogne until the 1st November 1918. Returning to the field the day that the Armistice was signed, Alec was promoted to acting Major as the Officer Commanding 4th Intelligence Corps Company.

Alec continued to command the 4th Intelligence Corp Company in France until he was granted leave to England on the 13th February 1919 for two weeks until the 27th February 1919. He was demobilised on the 27th April 1919 with the rank of Major.

The Cryptians' 1914-1918 reported:

April 1919

Captain A H T Lewis MC has been promoted to the rank of Major and is now in command of the 4th Army Intelligence Corp. He is expected to move up the Rhine very shortly.

1919 Roll of Honour . List of Old Cryptians who served in the war 1914-1919

Lewis A H T 1/5 Batt Gloucesters. Captain Royal Berks Regt.

MC 1916 Bar to MC 1917 Intelligence Corp.

The war now over, Alec found himself unemployed. He began working for Mr Holloway and Sons and then for the Western Trading Company.

A hero, Alec was invited to Gloucester football club events as this Christmas entry to the Gloucester Journal & Gloucestershire Chronicle 3rd January 1920 stated:

Gloucester Footballers Entertained:

Generous Donors Hospitality Greatly Appreciated:

*At the invitation of Messrs. Arthur F. Fielding...who on several occasions previously this season have extended their hospitality to the Gloucester football team- the players of both Fifteens, with the officials and committee and a few personal friends, were entertained to a Christmas dinner at the King's Arms Restaurant on Tuesday evening. The guests numbered around 50, the only players unable to accept being G. Holford (captain), **Alec Lewis**...*

Alec became a prominent golfer as well as returning to rugby as the Gloucestershire Chronicle & Gloucestershire Journal 21st February 1920 noted:

The Gloucester Golf Club:

Annual Meeting:

*The annual meeting of the Gloucester Golf Club was held at the New Inn Hotel on Wednesday evening...The Committee for 1920 embraced Messrs. J.H. Baker, C.H. Taynton, G.H. Romans, W.G.J. Titt, R. Macadie, C.F. Green and **Alec Lewis**.*

A true all-rounded sportsman, Alec tried his hand at rowing and made a success of himself as the Gloucester Journal 28th August 1920 alludes:

Gloucester Rowing Club:

The Annual Regatta Revived:

*Fine weather- although the temperature was on the chilly side- favoured the annual regatta of the Gloucester Rowing Club on Saturday afternoon. This athletic and social function is revived after an interval of five years, the last occasion being in 1914...There were four heats in the Pair Oars, L. Smith and **Alec Lewis** running out winners against G.P. Nixon and A.C.C. Swayne in the final...The prizes were afterwards distributed at the Castle Bridge by Mrs Frank Fielding in the absence of MRs John Fielding.*

The Gloucestershire Chronicle 28th August 1920 details the same race:

Gloucester Rowing Club:

Revival of Annual Regatta:

*After a lapse extending over all the years of war, the Gloucester Rowing Club has revived the annual regatta, the fixture taking place on the Caste Reach stretch of the Canal on Saturday. In the former days the course was the half mile of water at Hemsptsted, but the new venue have an almost straight mile...The programme contained five events, consisting of 26 races...Other results were: - Pair Oars.- fourth heat, G.H. Oxley a and S.O. Smith (winners of heat one) beat L. Smith and **Alec Lewis**...*

As does the Cheltenham Chronicle 28th August 1920:

Gloucester Rowing Club:

Annual Races:

*On Saturday last, in overcast weather, the Gloucester Rowing Club's annual races were held on the Castle Beach portion of the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal...Pair Oars:-...**Alec Lewis**...*

At a time when many from the war were physically unable to function, Alec remained as fit as ever winning a regatta a mere two years after the war's conclusion.

Alec was active once again playing rugby for Gloucester Old Boys as their captain. The Gloucestershire Echo 30th August 1920:

Gloucester City:

Gloucester Old Boys' R.F.C:

*The Gloucester Old Boys' Rugby Football Club has been resuscitated, and at a recent meeting the following officers were elected: **Captain Mr. Alec Lewis...***

Running on as a starter and scoring against Cheltenham Training College as the Gloucestershire Echo 9th October 1920 recorded:

Cheltenham Training College v. Gloucester Old Boys:

Two matches were played on the Cheltenham Training College ground on Saturday afternoon- one under the Rugby code and the other under Association rules. The Rugby game was late in starting owing to the delayed arrival of two of the visiting players. The conditions were ideal, and the teams turned out as under:-

*Gloucester Old Boys- ...Thee-Quarters: **Lewis (capt.)...***

*The game produced some nice open play, and was well refereed by Mr. Yiend. The visitors were heavier forward, and consequently had a big pull in the scrums. Still, the College did well, and like their opponents, adopted a good open game. The Gloucester old Boys were the smarter at half-back, and, getting the ball away very cleanly, they started many good rounds of passing. After ten minutes' play, Fisher scored for the visitors, and **Lewis converted**. The College tackled well, but were not so sure in their passing, and several promising movements broke down. At length, the visitors, who shone in three-quarter play, got over the line again, **Alec Lewis scoring. The goal-kick failed**. R.C. Brown followed with another try, and this was the extent of the scoring up to the interval.*

Half-Time:

Glo'ster Old Boys- 1 goal, 2 tries (11 pts)

Training College- nil.

Early in the second half the College came very near scoring, and Evans only just failed with a penalty kick. The visitors however, were the better balanced team, and scored three more tries through Brown (2) and Langston. Neither was converted,

Gloucester O.B.- 1g., 5 trs. (20 pts)

Training College- nil.

Alec and the Gloucester Old Boys gave the opposition a hiding. Perhaps Alec was thinking of his brothers and the teammates he lost in the war for strength during the match.

The next week Alec was playing again, the Cheltenham Chronicle 16th October 1920:

The Week's Sport:

Rugby Football:

*...Although adopting a good open game, St. Paul's Training College were defeated by Gloucester Old Boys, who scored 20 points to nil. The visitors to the Garden Tower were heavier forward, and their backs played prettily. Fisher, **Alec Lewis**, Langston, and R.C. Brown (**3**) scored, but only one was converted, this by Lewis...*

Alec captained Gloucester Old Boys against the Oil Mills. The Gloucestershire Echo 29th October 1920:

Football:

Teams For Tomorrow's Matches:

Rugby:

*Gloucester Old Boys v. Oil Mills- ...**Alec Lewis (captain)**...*

Again in the Gloucestershire Echo & Gloucester Citizen 28th January 1921:

Football:

Teams for To-morrow's Matches:

*Gloucester Old Boys v. Old Patesians: at Cheltenham (train 2o'clock G.W.R.) Old Boys: H.V. Adams; R. Brown, J.M. Baldwin, **Alec Lewis**...*

Proving his prowess with a golf club in hand, Alec tied for the Barnwood Challenge Bowl. Handicapped at 18, Alec was no slouch as the Gloucester Citizen 27th May 1921 recalls:

Gloucester Golf Club:

The Barnwood Challenge Bowl Tie:

*At the Gloucester Golf Club Sprung Meeting at Brockworth last week, in the competition for the Barnwood Challenge Bowl and Captain's Prize, W.H. Hampton (handicap 19) and **Alec Lewis (handicap 18)** returned gross scores of 91 and 90 respectively, and thus tied for the trophies with 72 net. The tie was played off on Thursday afternoon, with the result that **Lewis** won with a return of 90...To repeat his net score of 72 the old Gloucester footballer played a very steady, consistent game. Hampton's long game was good...Both men were out in 44: **Lewis** came home in 46 but Hampton required 55. After halving the first four holes Hampton got a bogey (3) at the short fifth, and **Lewis** equalled bogey at the 4th, 7th and 8th with 4, 4, 3. In the second half **Lewis** got bogeys at the 10th, 12th and 13th (5, 5, 3) and was one under bogey at the 15th and 16th which he did in 3 and 4 respectively...The captain (Mr. T. Rishworth) handed his prize to **Lewis** with felicitations upon his success, to which fellow members added congratulations, none being more hearty than those of the loser. The winner made suitable acknowledgement and in accordance with time-honoured custom, "set them up".*

Another account of the same tournament in the Gloucester Journal 28th May 1921:

Gloucester Golf Club:

*The Spring Meeting- The Gloucester Golf Club's Spring Meeting, held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday in last week on the picturesque links at Brockworth, was a complete success from every point of view...For the Bowl and Captain's Prize a tie resulted between W.H. Hampton (handicap 19) and **Alec Lewis (handicap 18)**, whose gross scores were 91 and **90 respectively**, or 72 net...The tie was played off on Thursday afternoon **with the result that Lewis won with a return of 90, 18-72** to*

Hampton's 99, 19-80. To repeat his net score of 72 the old Gloucester footballer played a very steady, consistent game...Both men were out in 44; Lewis came home in 46, but Hampton required 55. After halving the first four holes Hampton got a bogey (3) at the short fifth, and Lewis equalled bogey at the 4th, 7th, and 8th with 4, 4, 3. In the second half Lewis got bogeys at the 10th, 12th and 13th (5, 5, 3) and was one under bogey at the 15th and 16th which he did in 3 and 4 respectively. Hampton had 9's at the 14th, where his ball got into a rat hole, and the 17th where he found the ditch from the tee...The captain (Mr T. Rishworth) handed his prize to Lewis with felicitations upon his success, to which fellow members added congratulations, none being more hearty than those of the loser. The winner made suitable acknowledgment; and in accordance with time-honoured custom "set them up".

Alec was again elected to the board of the Gloucester Old Boys Rugby Football Club. The Gloucester Citizen & Gloucestershire Echo 10th August 1921:

Football:

Gloucester Old Boys' F.C.:

The annual general meeting was held at the New Pilot Hotel, Southgate-street, with Mr W.A. Thomas in the chair. The balance-sheet for the past season showed an adverse balance of £9 2s. 5d., but this has since been considerably reduced...The following officers were then elected:...general committee, Alec Lewis...

Alec was present at the director of Gloucester Football's funeral as the Gloucestershire Chronicle & Gloucester Journal 26th August 1922 recounted:

The Late Mr H.J. Berry:

Funeral at Barnwood Church:

The funeral of the late Mr H.J. Berry, of the New Inn Hotel, Gloucester, took place on Monday afternoon, when striking evidence was given, if such were necessary, of the high esteem in which he was held, by the large and representative gathering at Barnwood Church met to pay their last tribute of respect to his memory...representing the Gloucester Football and Athletic Ground Co. of which the deceased was a Director, apologies being received from...Alec Lewis...

That year, Alec was married to Elsie Mary Berry, the daughter of Mr and Mrs H. Berry of New Inn, at Gloucester.

A multi-faceted man Alec tried his hand at the arts, performing at the White Hart Assembly Room. The Gloucester Citizen 21st February 1924:

Tetbury:

Amateur Dramatic Society:

There was a full house at White Hart Assembly Room, Tetbury, on Tuesday evening, when the Tetbury Amateur Dramatic Society gave their first performance of Lord Richard in the Pantry." Mr Alec Lewis as "Lord Richard" was quite at home in his representation and kept the audience roaring with laughter, as did Mr Arthur Large, too, as Cook...

The Gloucester Citizen 14th November 1924:

Tetbury:

Amateur Operatic Society:

*The Tetbury amateur Operatic Society gave excellent performances on the three-act comedy "Brown Sugar" at the White Hart Assembly Room on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. There were large and appreciative audiences. Miss McCracken was very successful as "Brown Sugar," while **Mr Alex Lewis as Lord Sloane**, and Mrs Arthur Large (Countess of Knightsbridge) gave efficient interpretations of their parts.*

It seemed as though the war did not take Alec's sense of humour away, nor his sense of community. He continued to soldier on just as he did on the Western Front.

Mixing comedy with rugby, Alec entertained guests at a rugby presentation. The Gloucestershire Echo 28th January 1925:

Sporting Gossip:

*...A presentation was made on Tuesday evening by Mr A.S.F. Pruen the president of Naunton Park R.F.C, to Mr G. Hoare, the full-back of the club, who has recently been married. The presentation subscribed for by the members and playing members, was in the form of a palm stand and a rug...the following entertainers gave their services: -... **Alec Lewis**....*

Evidently a well-known and well-respected member of the community, Alec attended quite a number of funerals to pay his respects. The Gloucestershire Chronicle 6th May 1927:

Passed Away:

Funeral of the Late Mr. G. Holtham:

*There was a large and representative gathering at the funeral on Monday of the late Mr. G. Holtham, one of our most respected citizens, who died last week at his residence...Amongst those present at the church were:...**Mrs. Alec Lewis**...*

The Gloucester Citizen 22nd September 1931:

Wedding at Barnwood:

Clutterbuck-Eddowes:

*The wedding took place at Barnwood Church, Gloucester, this afternoon of Mr Albert Brian Clutterbuck, son of Mr and Mrs George Clutterbuck, of The Gateway, Barnwood, and **Miss Judith Mary Eddowes, daughter of Mrs Alec Lewis, 66 Oval Road Erdington, Birmingham.** Canon E.H. Brice (vicar) officiated.*

*The bride, who was given away by her **step-father Mr Alec Lewis**, wore a dress of pink georgette with hat to match, and carried a bouquet of pale pink roses.*

The bridesmaid, Miss Joyce Palmer (cousin of the bridegroom) was dressed in pale green satin beaute with coatee to tone, and yellow straw hat inset with green. She wore a string of pearls and carried a bouquet of yellow roses, the gifts of the bridegroom.

The duties of "best man" were discharged by Mr Roy James (cousin of the bridegroom).

After the ceremony a reception was held at the New Inn and later Mr and Mrs Clutterbuck left for their honeymoon, which is being spent in London and the South Coast.

Their future house will be 47, Lansdown Crescent, Cheltenham.

Alec's stepdaughter was a product of his wife's previous marriage.

The Western Daily Press 23rd September 1931 reported on the same incident:

A Footballer's Wedding at Gloucester:

The wedding took place at Barnwood Gloucester, yesterday, of Mr A.B. Clutterbuck, of the Gateway, Barnwood, and Miss Judith Mary Eddowes, daughter of Mr Alec Lewis, of the New Inn Gloucester. Mr Clutterbuck, who is a well-known local Rugby player, is the only son of Mr George Clutterbuck, the former Gloucester and County Rugby Player. Mr L.V. Huggins, a Gloucester referee, played the organ, and Mr Rov. James, vice-captain of the Gloucester Rugby team, was best man

Alec's father having passed away already, the death of his mother meant that only the Lewis children were left. Her funeral was announced in the Gloucester Journal 23rd April 1932:

Late Mrs S. Lewis Funeral Service in Gloucester:

The funeral of Mrs Susan Lewis of Overton, Dean's Way, Gloucester, took place yesterday. The first portion of the service was conducted at the house by Canon A.H. Cheesman the interment following at the Cemetery. The principal mourners were Messrs. Howard and Alec Lewis (sons), Gertrude and Susie (daughters), Mr and Mrs C.A. Hawkes, Mr and Mrs John Allen (sons-in-law and daughters), Mr F. Vigars (son-in-law) were unable to attend, and Bert (son) is in African and Edith (daughter) in Canada.

Alec's mother in law passed away 4 years later. The Gloucester Citizen 6th January 1936:

Death of Mrs H.J. Berry:

Long Connection with Gloucester Hotel:

We regret to announce the death of Mrs Elizabeth Mary Berry, widow of Mr Herbert James Berry, formerly proprietor of the New Inn Hotel, Gloucester, which occurred suddenly at the residence of her son-in-law and daughter at Denmark House, Woodfield, Dursley.

Mrs Berry spend the Christmas with her son and daughter-in-law, MR and Mrs Harry Beryy, at the New Inn, but she was taken ill on the following Monday. She was removed to Dursley on Wednesday, and passed away early yesterday morning.

MR Berry was a native of Brighton, being the fourth son of the late Mr and Mrs H.E. Berry, with whom he came to Gloucester in his early youth, his father being in business as a chemist at the Cross.

Shortly after his marriage in 1884, MR Berry ventured into the hotel business with Mrs Berry became the tenant of the White Hart Moreton-in-Marsh. His keen interest in all branches of sport quickly gained for him, as it did in the city, great popularity in the district. For years later he returned to Gloucester to become tenant of the New Inn Hotel, which he purchased outright in 1889.

From that time the New Inn has steadily built up a reputation that is second to none in the West of England. MR and Mrs Berry personally supervised the conduct of their house and took a real interest in the comfort of their guests, by all of whom they were held in the highest respect and esteem.

In his younger days Mr Berry took a keen interest in sport, and distinguished himself as an athlete and footballer. He frequently appeared as a fullback for the Gloucester Rugby Football Club in the late seventies and the early eighties and also secured his county cap. A serious injury to his knee,

unfortunately put an early end to his football career, and also prevented him for the rest of his life, from taking an active part in outdoor sports.

The death of Mr Berry took place in August 1922, but before that date Mr Harry Berry, the only son, had taken over the responsibilities of the active management of the hotel. Since her husband's death Mrs Berry had been in partnership and next year she would have completed 50 years in connection with it.

*She leaves in addition to Mr Harry Berry, two daughters, **Mrs Alec Lewis** and Mrs A. M. Davies with the latter of whom she has been living in recent years. The sympathy of a wide circle of friends, not only in the city and county, but in many parts of the country, will be extended to the family in their bereavement.*

The funeral will take place at Barnwood on Thursday, the service at the church being timed for 2:30.

The Gloucester Journal 11th January 1936 had an article describing the same funeral:

Many Mourners At Barnwood:

*Many indications of the grief widely felt at the death of Mrs Elizabeth Mary Berry, widow of Mr Herbert James Berry...The principal mourners present were...**Mrs Alec Lewis (daughter)**...Mr Alec Lewis (son-in-law) and Mrs J. Clutterbuck were unable to attend owing to indisposition.*

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Alec was working for Dunlop in Birmingham. With news of the conflict, he joined the local home guard where his prominent experience as a soldier rendered him a valuable asset.

On the 27th October 1941 Alec passed away at the age of 54 having lived a full and honest life. At the time he was living at Meriden in Warwickshire. Obituaries sang his praise as the outpouring of grief from the local community was palpable. The Gloucester Citizen 29th October 1941:

Former Glo'ster Footballer:

Death of Mr. Alec Lewis:

His many friends in Gloucester and the county will hear with regret of the death of Mr. Alec H. T. Lewis, which has taken place in Birmingham. Mr Lewis was formerly well-known in the city, particularly in sporting circles.

Educated at the Crypt Grammar School, he followed the teaching profession until the outbreak of the Great War.

A clever three-quarter, he first played Rugby for Gloucester Old Boys, and came into the City side under the captaincy of Mr. Arthur Hudson, being a regular member up to the outbreak of the Great War. He also appeared for two or three seasons from 1919-1920. Mr Lewis gained his county cap and altogether made seven appearances for Gloucestershire.

He was also for a number of years, a prominent member of the Gloucester Rowing Club and the Gloucester Gold Club.

He volunteered with three brothers at the outbreak of the Great War, and served with the 1/5 Gloucesters in Flanders. Commissioned in France and gazetted to the 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment, he rapidly rose to the rank of Major, gaining the Military Cross and later a bar to the Military Cross. He was twice wounded.

At the cessation of hostilities, Mr Lewis returned to Gloucester, and for a time was with Messrs. Holloway Son & Co., and the Western Trading Company. Finally he took a post with Messrs. Dunlop at Birmingham, where during the present war he has rendered invaluable service in the organisation and instruction of the Home Guard.

He is to be cremated on Friday, and by the request of his employers is to be accorded full military honours.

He married Elsie, elder daughter of the late Mr and Mrs H. Berry of the New Inn, Gloucester, and sympathy will be extended to her and her son and daughter in their loss.

The Gloucestershire Echo 29th October 1941:

Town and County News:

Rugby Player Dead:

The death has taken place in Birmingham of Mr. Alec. H. T. Lewis, a former Gloucester and county Rugby player. At the outbreak of the Great War, Mr Lewis volunteered (with his three brothers), was commissioned in France, and rapidly attained the rank of major. He was twice wounded. He was awarded the M.C. and Bar.

The Cheltenham Chronicle 1st November 1941:

Rugby Player Dead:

The death has taken place in Birmingham of Mr. Alec H.T. Lewis, a former Gloucester and county Rugby player. At the outbreak of the Great War, Mr. Lewis volunteered (with his three brothers), was commissioned in France, and rapidly attained the rank of major. He was twice wounded. He was awarded the M.C. and Bar.

The Gloucester Citizen 1st November 1941:

Changed But Did Not Play:

Reminisces of Late Mr. A. Lewis:

Two interesting incidents are recalled by "W.B" in the football career of the late Alec Lewis. In his first season with the Gloucester Club (1912-13) he was reserve for Gloucestershire in the final of the County Championship against Cumberland, and travelled with the team to Carlisle.

The journey was broken at Leeds on the Friday night and when the party assembled at the railway station the following morning to continue the trip, one of the players (Jim Watkins of Cinderford) was missing.

Watkin failed to appear at Carlisle, and Gloucestershire in the emergency decided to play seven forwards with Lewis as extra three-quarter. The players changed and the team was photographed with Alec included in the group ("W.B." possess a framed copy of this photograph presented by the President, the late Mr Walter Pearce).

The kick-off was delayed some minutes in the faint hope that Watkins might turn up, but the crowd grew impatient and a start was about to be made when the stalwart Cinderford forward dashed up to the ground.

There was a hurried consultation by the Gloucestershire officials. Lewis was asked to stand by, and finally it was Watkins and not the Gloucester three-quarter who figured in the side.

Gloucestershire won the match by 14 points to three and our late friend missed a Championship Final by a couple of minutes!

Alec had the sympathy of everyone in his disappointment, but, like the good sportsman he was, he accepted the position in the right spirit.

A Famous Match:

The other incident had a more favourable aspect for Lewis. It was his second season with Gloucester with George Holford as captain. Alec was included in the City team for the big match against the formidable Harlequins team at Twickenham, and he had as colleagues at three-quarter, Fred Webb, Lionel Hamblin and W. Washbourn, with Charles Cook at full-back and "tart" Hall and J. Baker at half.

The Harlequins fielded a team of star players, including the great John Birkett, D. Lambert, Frank Stoop and H.J. Sibree (all English Internationals) in the back division. The Gloucester third line were eclipsed as regards physique compared with the opposition, but what a defence those four lads put up that afternoon, and they were splendidly supported by the rest of the side.

There were occasions when it took three Gloucester players to bring Birkett (a powerful runner) down, but their marking was so effective that he failed to beat the defence. And Alec Lewis did his full share of this remarkable work.

Gloucester triumphed by two goals (dropped by Lionel Hamblin) to nil, and the City achieved one of the most notable victories in the Club's history.

Alec Lewis joined the Premier City team from Gloucester Old Boys with several other players, including Norman Hayes and the late Sid Millard, both of whom, like their popular colleague, secured County honours. Hayes, by the way, was a member of the Gloucestershire team which defeated Cumberland in the match previously referred to.

Lewis was a clever, resourceful, centre three-quarter, and on occasions shaped extremely well at outside half. Smart in attack, he varied his tactics with great skill and was ever mindful of the fact that he had dangerous scoring wings in Arthur Hudson and Fred Webb.

The Gloucester Citizen 18th November 1941 & Gloucester Journal 22nd November 1941 gives one last article on Alec:

In a Darkened Room They Remembered:

Old Comrades' Impressive Tribute in Gloucester:

In a darkened room in Gloucester on Monday night a number of local veterans of the last war paid an impressive tribute to the 30 officers and 557 other ranks whom they left behind in France, Belgium and Italy- men of Gloucester and district, who made the supreme sacrifice of their country.

The gathering was the annual remembrance of the Gloucester branch of the 1/5 Glo'ster Old Comrades' Association at the Services' Club.

*The President (Mr R. Whyman) in opening the proceeding, said the present war had made veterans wonder whether what they did in 1914-18 had been for the best. Of those war years, it could be said that they all lived simply and in the company of those who were comrades and friends at their best. He referred to the fact that the meeting was the first for some time, and had lost valued members by the deaths of Messrs. Jim Meadows, **Alec Lewis**, and Frank Taylor...*

Then came Lord Haldane's reorganisation in 1906 and the 2nd V.B.G.R. became the 5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment, He recalled by name the long list of stalwarts who built up the new Battalion in peace time. They were men who visualised the coming menace, and were ready and willing to prepare for the event. That came in 1914, when the Battalion was mobilised, and they quickly settled down to training at Chelmsford, where that devoted, pally and loyal band of men called the 5th Glosters really came into existence.

British, Trade Union Members, Service & Casualties 1914-1918:

N. U. T. War Record:

Lewis, A.H.T. .. Gloucester

Alec was cremated at Perry Bar on the 31st October 1941 and was given full military honour in accordance with the request of his employers. Although he was a brave man and a fearless leader on the battlefield, it was rugby that Alec loved the most.

Martin and Teresa Davies summarise Alec's playing career in their book Gloucester Rugby Football Club a Place in Military History:

Alec, a Centre from Gloucester Old Boys, made eighty-four appearances for the Gloucester Football Club between 1908 and 1914, of which seventy-eight were for the First XV. After the war he returned to the Club but made only a further nine appearances for the First XV in the 1919-20 season; he scored fifteen tries for the First XV. His contribution to the Club was recognised by his inclusion in the Club's Honours Boards for the 1910-11, 1912-13 and 1913-14 seasons. Alec gained the first of his seven Gloucestershire County Caps in the 1912-13 season against Hampshire. During the war he played for the 5/Gloucester XV and was a member of the D Company XV which won the Inter-Company Championship in 1915.